



Israel and Morocco: Cooperation Rooted in Heritage

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A. Introduction

About one million Moroccan Jews currently live in Israel and tens of thousands of Israelis visit Morocco every year for tourism purposes, business or family visits. This reality leads Israel and Morocco to be warm and unique. There are countless surprising examples of cooperation that cannot be found in Israel's relations with any other Arab or Muslim country. Still, the cooperation between Israel and Morocco is far from realizing its potential. It is limited due to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is influenced by the boycott movements in Morocco.

The relationship between Israel and Morocco has not been properly studied since October 2000, when the official relations between the two countries were severed. This article is intended to shed light on the existing and potential relationship between the two countries. The article includes four parts: the first part provides a historical, social and political background on Morocco and the Israeli-Moroccan friendship as it has developed over the years; the second part deals with the interests and characteristics of the cooperation between the two countries and analyzes the potential, while addressing the political, security, economic, business and civil society spheres; the third part includes a mapping of the existing initiatives carried out by Israelis and Moroccans; and the last part deals with the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the relations between the two countries.

The findings of the article are based on Israeli, Moroccan, Arab and Western media sources and on publicly available statistics. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts from academia, with diplomats and with private sector professionals, who were involved (and some are still involved) in Israel-Morocco cooperation. The main challenges in terms of the sources for this article were the lack of studies that map existing cooperation, the difficulty in identifying the many existing initiatives that are facilitated through a third party, and the reluctance of Moroccan and Israeli officials to be interviewed due to sensitivities involved.

B. Background on Morocco and its relations with Israel

Morocco, or in its official name *al-Mamlaka al-Maghribia*, was established in 1956 in North Africa, in an area known as the Maghreb. It has a population of 34 million people, with 99 percent Sunni Muslims. Morocco's political system continues to transform slowly and cautiously from a centralized monarchy to a parliamentary monarchy. The king retains most executive powers, but the parliament and the prime minister are elected democratically.

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Since his rise in 1999, Morocco's King Mohammed VI has led to significant domestic changes, including infrastructure development in rural areas, liberalization of the private sector, fostering of civil society, development of the financial sector, and reducing living costs. As a result, the economy is growing. Morocco has successfully endured the Arab Spring protests, in part because of the constitutional reform announced by the King in July 2011. The reform included relinquishing part of his administrative powers whereby the Prime Minister will be the leader of the party that won the general elections rather than be appointed by the King; granting new civil rights; and promoting legislation relating to the status of women under the new Family Code (2004). Alongside the economic and social reforms, the King continued to strengthen the army and appoint close associates to key positions.¹

Since 2011, Morocco has been dominated by the Justice and Development Party (PJD), a moderate Islamist party that opposes normalization with Israel. This opposition came to the fore in August 2013 when the PJD, together with other parties, submitted a bill to ban any relations between Morocco and Israel. This bill eventually did not pass, but it well reflected the spirit of the times.²

As far as foreign relations go, Morocco is active in a number of circles: The African, the Arab and the international. In terms of the African circle, Morocco has recently renewed contacts with African countries after more than thirty years and is now working on strengthening its position in various African forums such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Morocco withdrew from the African Union in 1984, following its recognition of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a self-declared state in the Sahara region, which Morocco claims to be an integral part of its territorial sovereignty.

As far as the international community is concerned, Morocco continues to strengthen its ties with the international community in general, and with the US and the EU in particular, despite occasional tensions, particularly against the backdrop of the conflict in the Sahara region. In contrast, in terms of Arab affairs, Morocco has reduced its involvement in recent years, since the Arab regional system fails to meet Morocco's main needs, i.e. continued economic and social development and the safeguarding of the Moroccan interests in the Sahara region.³

However, Morocco has significant allies among Arab states, first and foremost with Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC countries recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara and provide Morocco with economic aid, while Morocco grants military assistance to Saudi Arabia in Yemen and tried to mediate in the conflict between the Gulf states and Qatar.⁴

¹ Since Mohammed VI started democratizing his country in 2001, local governors have gained more authority, but since the local governors are appointed by the King himself, this ultimately strengthened his power. Another example of the King's power in Moroccan democracy was his involvement in forming government coalitions. Thus, in April 2017, the King approved a new coalition, after the elected Prime Minister of the PJD, Benkirane, failed in his task of forming a coalition. The King dismissed Benkirane and appointed the party's second strongest person, Saad Eddine al-Othmani, who is now prime minister.

² Vish Sakthivel, "[Morocco Plays with Anti-Normalization](#)," *The Washington Institute*, 13 December 2013.

³ [The World Bank in Morocco](#), *World Bank*, April 2017.

⁴ Interview with a Moroccan entrepreneur (remained anonymous), December 15, 2017; Ayelet Levy, "[Morocco: Return to the African Union and the Continuing Disengagement from the Arab League](#)," Africa-Africa Research Program, Tel Aviv University, 23 May 2017.

An inward look at Moroccan society reveals its diversity as well as the rifts that characterize it as a society. Two main ethnic groups make up Moroccan society, Arabs and Amazigh. The latter are also known as "Berbers". They are the first residents of Morocco and North Africa and are estimated to be between 50 and 60 percent of the population. Upon independence in 1956, Morocco adopted a national Arab identity, while the Amazigh heritage was marginalized. This exclusion led to the awakening of the Amazigh protest, which calls for enhancing the Amazigh cultural presence in the Moroccan national narrative and for narrowing the gaps between the capital and the rural areas which are mostly inhabited by Amazigh population.

Since Muhammad VI assumed power, he has been improving the situation in order to calm the protest and ensure the stability of the kingdom.⁵ Nonetheless, these objectives are yet to be achieved. For example, Morocco forbids giving children Amazigh names, therefore Moroccan Amazigh citizens hold two names – one Arab and the other Amazigh. For the past two years, residents of the Rif region have been raging in Morocco, over neglecting the northern part of the country.⁶

The Arab-Amazigh divide in Moroccan society is relevant to Israel-Morocco relations in view of the historical and cultural connection between the Jews and the Amazigh people. In the first centuries after Christ, many Amazigh tribes converted to Judaism and to this day they see Judaism as part of the Amazigh heritage. According to a well-known Amazigh tale, an Amazigh leader, named Kahina, was a Jewish woman who fought the Arab armies' invasion of Morocco. Also, as of today there are Jews of Amazigh origin living in Israel and they are perceived by the Amazigh in Morocco and in the diaspora as Amazigh for all intents and purposes.

Nowadays, there are those who view the Jewish-Amazigh connection as an alliance against a common Arab enemy. There are Amazigh activists who see Israel as a role model, as a country that succeeded in reviving its extinct heritage against all odds and while fighting the Arabs. The Israeli connection with the Amazigh activists has stirred criticism in the media, both in Morocco and abroad. Critics see this as a subversive connection, directed against the Arab and Islamist populations in Morocco.⁷

The friendship between Israel and Morocco began at the end of the 1950s, when the immigration of Jews to Israel needed to be regulated, especially after the sinking of the illegal immigrant vessel *Egoz* in January 1961. Later, the relations between Morocco and Israel warmed up as Gamal Abdel Nasser was reinforcing his rule and his pan-Arab ideology, which threatened both Israel and Morocco. In October 1963, Morocco and Israel signed a "revolving" arms deal (via Iran). Mystère airplanes and French-made tanks made their way from Israel to Morocco to assist in the war against Algeria, which received Egyptian assistance.⁸

⁵ Among the measures taken are the establishment of the IRCAM center in Rabat, that acts to preserve the Amazigh heritage, reviewing educational programs, encouraging research of the Amazigh heritage, and reviving the Amazigh language. In addition, the ban on the use of Amazigh languages on state television channels have been abolished, and today Amazigh languages are taught in about 50% of the country's elementary schools.

⁶ Ayelet Levy, "[The People Demand the King's Intervention](#)," *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, 27 June 2017.

⁷ Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "[Morocco's Berbers and Israel](#)," *The Middle East Quarterly* 18(2), 2011.

⁸ Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

The trust between Israel and Morocco grew stronger until, in 1976, King Hassan hosted for the first time an Israeli prime minister. It was Yitzhak Rabin, who came to explore the possibility that Morocco would help promote a dialogue between Israel and Egypt. A year later, Morocco hosted a secret meeting between the foreign ministers of Israel and Egypt, which paved the way for Sadat's famous visit to Israel. In the early 1990s, the Oslo Accords allowed relations between the two countries to develop and expand, and in September 1993, Rabin and Peres visited Morocco on their way back from Washington after the signing of the Declaration of Principles with the PLO in order to promote formal relations between Israel and Morocco. Following this visit to Morocco the relations warmed up and a period of economic peace had started. The good intentions of the Moroccans led to the appointment of Serge Berdugo, the leader of the Jewish community, to the Minister of Tourism and to the visit of a high-level delegation of Moroccan directors of major companies to Israel.⁹

In 1994, a kind of honeymoon began in Israel-Morocco relations, which lasted for six years. At the end of October 1994, Hassan II hosted the Casablanca Conference, attended by leaders and businessmen from Israel and the Arab countries, as part of a series of regional economic conferences designed to promote economic partnerships between the Middle East and North Africa. Upon the end of the conference, the Casablanca Declaration was released, which ended the Arab boycott of Israel, and as a result, Israel and Morocco opened liaison offices in Rabat and Tel Aviv.

The death of King Hassan II in 1999, the failure of the Camp David peace conference in 2000, and the outbreak of the second intifada, led to the cooling of relations between Israel and Morocco. Official diplomatic relations were severed and the new King, Muhammad VI, preferred to focus on establishing his rule and addressing Morocco's main challenges: the strengthening of Islamism, the conflict over the Sahara region, and the challenges of development. In order to cope with these challenges, the King took a number of steps, including: a huge investment in infrastructure development projects in Morocco (providing electricity and water for every household), reducing unemployment, strengthening education and health systems, improving the status of women, reforming the political system, and recognizing the Amazigh heritage.

In the political climate that prevails in Morocco as the Islamist ideology is growing stronger, as well as the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in recent years, an improvement in the official relations between Israel and Morocco seems very unlikely. However, it is advisable to maintain cautious optimism, such that will allow to leverage existing opportunities and identify new and future opportunities that may become relevant if the regional dynamic changes.¹⁰

C. The potential for cooperation between Israel and Morocco

The potential for cooperation between Israel and Morocco has remained unfulfilled over the years, with the exception of a short period during 1994-2000. Those six years were a taste of cooperation that might have been. Since then, cooperation remains limited and depends on the progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and on political and social developments in Morocco, Israel and the region. In order to assess the potential for

⁹ Shmuel Segev, *The Moroccan Connection* (Tel Aviv: Shmuel Segev, 2008); "[Rabin and Peres Visit Morocco Amid Hope for Diplomatic Ties](#)," *JTA*, 14 September 1993.

¹⁰ Vish Sakthvel, "[Morocco Plays with Anti-Normalization](#)," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 13 December 2013.

cooperation between Israel and Morocco, attention must be paid to the six interests and the attributes of relations between Israel and Morocco:

The Jewish-Moroccan connection - Judaism is not foreign to Morocco and is actually perceived as part of the Moroccan heritage by virtue of two thousand years of joint history in Morocco. At the end of the 1940s, the Jewish community in Morocco was the largest in the Arab world and included about 270,000 Jews. The large portion of this community emigrated to Israel in the mid-1950s led to personal contacts between Israeli and Moroccan officials. The small Jewish community that remained in Morocco today numbers about 2,500 people, and its representatives continue to play significant roles and be a connecting link between Morocco and Moroccan Jewry in the Diaspora, including in Israel. Worth mentioning is Andre Azoulay, a Moroccan Jew who serves as an advisor to the King of Morocco, and Serge Berdugo, president of the Jewish community and former Minister of Tourism, who was awarded the title of "Ambassador Itinerant of His Majesty King Mohammed VI". His main role is to enlist the support of the Jewish lobby in the US in favor of Morocco.¹¹

Middle Eastern peripherality - Morocco is located on the westernmost edge of the Middle East, which makes it geographically distant from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Morocco's affiliation to Africa, as well as its ties with the West, are more important to Morocco than its involvement in the Arab regional system. In fact, the question of whether Morocco is a part of the Middle East is raised often, as reflected in the Facebook group by the name *Morocco is not in the Middle East*.¹² The peripherality of Morocco in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict is also due to the cultural diversity and composition of the Moroccan population, which is estimated to include 50-60 percent Amazighs. Some see Israel as part of the global Amazigh diaspora, in view of the Jewish population of Amazigh origin living there. According to one of the known myths in this context, the Amazighs and the Zionists made a pact against the Arabs, who are perceived as the common enemy. This claim is repeated in the Moroccan media and in the Arab and Muslim world every time an Amazigh delegation visits Israel or meets with Israeli officials in Morocco. Whether a myth or not, the return of the Jewish people to Israel is a source of inspiration for the Amazighs in North Africa. Moreover, the myth is mainly used by politicians in Morocco, including Islamist parties, to undermine the Amazigh activity in the country.¹³

Moderation and struggle against Pan-Arab and Islamic extremism - Morocco and Israel are moderate countries and are both fending off threats from radical Islamic groups, as well as radical Pan-Arab groups. This trend was already evident in 1963, when Israel granted military aid to Morocco (a "revolving" arm deal through France that included military equipment such as MiG aircrafts and tanks), following the intervention of Gamal Abdel Nasser in the war between Morocco and Algeria. The common interest had two reasons: one is the need to block the pan-Arab ideology that guided Nasser and the second was to preserve the Arab states as separate sovereign entities. In recent years Israel and Morocco have partnered with other moderate countries in an effort to fight radical Muslim terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and Daesh. This partnership between Israel and Morocco is manifested ideologically as well as by participating in international forums dealing with the topic.¹⁴

¹¹ Segev, *ibid.*

¹² [Morocco is not in the Middle East](#), Facebook group.

¹³ Maddy-Weitzman, *ibid.*

¹⁴ In April 2006, it was reported that Israel, Morocco and Algeria would begin maritime patrols to prevent terrorism by virtue of their membership in the NATO organization. "[Israel, Algeria, Morocco to Join NATO](#)

Pro-Western orientation - Israel and Morocco turn westward in terms of their foreign policy, which sometimes brings them together on the same side, for example, in the framework of the Coalition Against Radical Terrorism (alongside the US) and the EU Neighborhood Program (ENP). As a mean of maintaining their stability and coping with internal and regional challenges, they both enjoy aid and investment from Western countries.

As far as the relations with the US is concerned, Israel and Morocco aspire to secure American support of their interests with regard to the conflicts they are involved in. In the case of Israel, it is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while in the Moroccan case it is a conflict in the Sahara region. Trump's presidency announced the strengthening of ties between the US and Israel, that was reflected in particular in the transfer of the American Embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018 and in the growing American support for Israel at the UN. From Morocco's point of view, the nature of the emerging relationship between the Trump administration was unclear. One of the reasons being a delay of almost a year in the appointment of the US ambassador to Morocco until David Fischer was appointed in November 2017. Nevertheless, the relationship between Morocco and the US is very strong and is based on a long history of warm and sympathetic relations, alongside the protection of common interests such as preserving the stability in North Africa and the Sahl area and joint efforts to prevent terrorism.¹⁵

In terms of the relations with the EU, Morocco and Israel are both situated in the vicinity of Europe and both have complex relations with the EU, that oscillates between extensive cooperation and harsh European criticism of Israeli conduct in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the conduct of Morocco in the Sahara.¹⁶ The need to define the scope of the relations with the EU is shared by Israel and Morocco, and they can learn from each other in this context.

Reciprocal mediation - Throughout the years, Morocco was helped by Israel and the Moroccan Jewish diaspora in the US and in Canada to solidify its relations with the West. In November 1979, for example, a delegation from the Jewish community in Morocco headed by businessman David Amar, who served at the time as the head of the Jewish community, left for the US in order to enlist the support of the US Congress in providing aid to Morocco so it could modernize its air force. Another example to the role of the Jewish community as a bridge to North American Jewry was Berdugo's appointment as a "traveling ambassador" whose role was to nurture the ties with the Jewish lobby in North America.

For its part, Israel views Morocco as a friendly mediator vis-à-vis the Arab and Muslim world. This was reflected in the peace process between Israel and Egypt, when Morocco offered a friendly meeting place for both sides and hosted multiple key meetings that paved the way

[Counter-Terrorism Patrols](#)," *Haaretz*, 7 April 2006. Israel, however, was not included in the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) anti-terrorism efforts, because of Turkey's resolute objection. "[Counter terrorism Forum Excludes Israel, despite State's History of Combating Terrorism](#)," *The Times of Israel*, 13 July 2012.

¹⁵ Hassan Masiky, "[Washington: Morocco Missing an Opportunity in the Trump Administration](#)," *Morocco World News*, 18 January 2018; Samir Bennis, "[Why Trump Took Almost a Year to Choose an Ambassador to Morocco](#)," *Morocco World News*, 22 November 2017.

¹⁶ Morocco's criticism, in the case of the Sahara, and that of Israel, in the case of the settlements, is expressed in the issue of marking products originating from those regions, in order to prevent Israel and Morocco from enjoying economic gains generated in trading these products. For further details, see Amir Tibon, "[Confusion in Europe: The Court of the Union supports the Israeli claim against marking products](#)," *Walla News*, 16 December 2015.

for the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt.¹⁷ Morocco's efforts to bring about peace were also evident in the interactions between Israel and the Palestinians. In March 1982, Morocco hosted in Fez an Arab summit in which Morocco and Saudi Arabia presented a peace plan calling for recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.¹⁸ In 1994, Morocco hosted the Casablanca Conference to encourage economic cooperation between Israel, the Middle East and North Africa in the Oslo process. Since the rise of Muhammad VI to power, Morocco has not played a central role in resolving the conflicts between Israel and its neighbors apart from participating in and supporting initiatives and conventions to promote a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁹

Securing peace in Jerusalem and the holy sites of Islam - Morocco serves as Chair of the Jerusalem Committee and its Islamic Holy Sites on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This is a very important Moroccan interest, as this role attests to the King's religious authority as a descendant of the Prophet's family. Morocco's desire for stability and its moderate policy is in fitting with Israel's desire to maintain stability and the status quo in the Old City of Jerusalem. Throughout the years, the importance of Morocco's role was mainly symbolic, and Morocco convened the committee only a few times. However, this role may cause tensions and disagreements, especially when the relations between Israel and the Palestinians deteriorate, and Morocco is forced to act on the issue of the holy sites in Jerusalem. For example, in December 2017, the King sent a special message to Trump in response to his decision to transfer the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Muhammad VI expressed his personal concern about such a move, which could undermine the chances of achieving a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The King urged Trump to refrain from any step that might provoke any sentiments of frustration or disappointment, which according to him are the root cause of extremism and terrorism.²⁰

Based on these interests and attributes, following is an analysis of the potential for cooperation between Morocco and Israel. It is important to note that this is a forecast for a complex and surprising reality that is not always predictable. The analysis is based on past experience, with an emphasis on the relations between the two countries in the 1990s, but also on the manner in which Israel-Morocco relations have developed since then - and on the common interests, structural characteristics, and the needs of both countries. The analysis demonstrates how relations can develop, if and when political conditions ripen and a significant breakthrough occurs between Israel and the Palestinians.

1. Potential for diplomatic cooperation

The potential for diplomatic cooperation between Israel and Morocco begins with the establishment of full and official diplomatic relations, which would lead to the opening of

¹⁷ The Moroccan efforts to advance the peace process between Israel and Egypt were also expressed in a series of meetings between Israeli, Moroccan and Egyptian officials on Moroccan soil: the meeting between Moshe Dayan and Hassan II in August 1971 in Marrakech; Moshe Dayan meets with Hassan II and Hassan Tohami, Deputy Prime Minister of Egypt, in September 1977; and Dayan's meeting with Tohami and Hassan II, December 1977.

¹⁸ Israel, which was not explicitly mentioned in the plan, rejected it because it was not willing to recognize a Palestinian state alongside Israel. For further reading, see Segev, *ibid*.

¹⁹ Morocco participated in the Annapolis Peace Conference in November 2007. Morocco has also supported the Arab peace initiative over the years.

²⁰ Ben Ariel, "[Moroccan King 'deeply concerned' over embassy move](#)," *Arutz Sheva*, 6 December 2017.

embassies and economic attaches and to laying the initial foundation for further cooperation. This point is important because there are many economic and civic partnerships between the two countries, but there are obstacles that arise from the absence of relevant regulatory institutions.²¹ Establishing official diplomatic relations will allow Israel and Morocco to expand their cooperation in regional and international forums, which may lead to a favorable change in Morocco's voting pattern in Muslim, Arab and international forums with regard to Israel. Official diplomatic relations will also allow for more delegation exchanges between the two countries, which will strengthen and expand cooperation and will lead to a better understanding at the political level. In the political-economic sphere, Israel and Morocco will benefit from establishing chambers of commerce and drafting agreements that will promote cooperation in areas such as health, education, culture, agriculture, telecommunications, industry, the environment, and sustainable development.

2. Potential for security cooperation

It is difficult to assess the potential for cooperation in a sector that conducts its activities mostly underground, and yet it is clear that Israel and Morocco have common security interests. Since both countries belong to the moderate axis in the region, the war against terror organizations is a common need, which can also be a motivator for the two countries to participate in regional security forums that will be established in the future. In addition, Israel and Morocco have an interest and ability to help each other in dealing with internal and external security challenges based on their experience. Israel has gained such experience when dealing with the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and has in the past helped Morocco, according to foreign sources, build a security fence in the Sahara. Moreover, Israel has an interest in carrying out arms deals with Morocco, which were already carried out in the past.

3. Potential for economic and business cooperation

Foreign Trade - The potential here is conditioned on the ability to openly conduct trade between the two countries. In recent years, Morocco has invested considerable resources in branding itself, especially Casablanca, as an economic-financial hub that encourages foreign investments and connects Africa with Europe, America and Asia. Morocco invests in the infrastructure of seaports and airports in Casablanca, Tangier and Agadir in order to realize its objectives.²² These steps may open trade channels and other economic opportunities for Israel, as well as increase the volume of trade between the countries. It is reasonable to assume that the trade volumes involved are not significant in comparison to the trade between Israel and other countries, but they undoubtedly have a significant added value in Israel's efforts to become part of the regional economy. In addition, Morocco can serve as a distribution center of Israeli and Israeli-Moroccan goods to neighboring European countries, North and South America and to African countries, with whom both Morocco and Israel have recently intensified relationships.

²¹ In this context, Morocco today has bilateral free trade agreements with 55 countries and regions, while Israel has only 39 agreements. The number of Israeli agreements is expected to increase if and to the extent that there is significant progress with advancing an agreement with the Palestinians. Source: "[Interview with Nizar Baraka, chairman of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council \(CESE\)](#)," *The Report Company*, 28 January 2016.

²² [Foreign Trade Operator's Guide](#), *Ministère Délégué auprès du Ministère de l'Industrie du Commerce de l'Investissement et de l'Economie Numérique Maroc*, 2015.

Agriculture, fish, and food - This is a significant potential for cooperation since Morocco relies heavily on agriculture. The sector of agriculture is responsible for about 44 percent of the jobs market in the Moroccan economy, thus alleviating unemployment.²³ Over the years, Israel has accumulated extensive agricultural experience, while Morocco is currently moving from traditional to commercial agriculture, which includes the entire agricultural production chain. The cooperation between Morocco and Israel in this field is likely to expand in the future in two important ways: one is knowledge sharing and the import of smart agricultural developments from Israel to Morocco, similar to greenhouse technology and drip irrigations that was already imported to Morocco;²⁴ the second would be to expand the activity of Israeli farmers in Morocco by establishing agricultural farms. Such farms will create new employment opportunities for local Moroccan labor force and will address the needs of Israeli farmers who are also coping with similar challenges. However, Israel and Morocco will probably continue to compete against one another over the export of commodities such as citrus to Europe and the US.

Tourism - One of the prominent sectors in Morocco, who is aiming to double the annual number of visiting tourists from 10.3 million (as of 2016) to 20 million by 2020.²⁵ Today, the number of Israeli tourists in Morocco ranges from 25,000 to 45,000, annually, mainly through organized tours. According to estimates, if Israel's relations with the region significantly improves, this number is expected to triple, and reach 120,000.²⁶ In a situation of full diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel, the visa issuance process for Israelis and Moroccans will become less cumbersome and Israel will become a tourist attraction for Moroccans who will visit the holy sites of Islam and beyond. The Moroccan tourist will be able to combine visits to sites in neighboring countries such as Ramallah, Aqaba, Petra, Amman and the Sinai Peninsula. With regard to aviation, the countries may sign agreements regulating their joint activity in three major areas: expanding the "interline" agreement, which regulates the flight of passengers through third countries; signing a commercial agreement; operating direct flights without a stopover. Such agreements will meet the rising demand for flights and shorten the average flight time.²⁷

4. Potential for civic cooperation

Culture, art, and heritage - The potential in this area is based mainly on the Jewish-Moroccan bond, which creates a space for cultural activities based on a common and shared identity. The potential is great, and its realization may lead to a greater movement of Moroccan and Israeli artists performing in Morocco and around the world. The expected demand in this context is for various types of Moroccan music and culture. Morocco also has an extensive film industry and some of the best in the world, but there is no cooperation yet with Israel in this sector, partly due to the lack of joint production agreements. The signing of such agreements will be an incentive and will make it easier for Israeli and Moroccan artists to cooperate and find sources of funding.²⁸

²³ [Morocco – Agricultural Sector](#), *export.gov*, 25 October 2017.

²⁴ Ruti Krichman, "Israeli Orchardists in the Orchards of Morocco," *Et Hadar*, April 2013.

²⁵ Chaima Lahsini, "[10.3 Million Tourists Visited Morocco in 2016](#)," *Morocco World News*, 21 February 2017; [Foreign Trade Operator's Guide](#), *ibid*.

²⁶ An interview with Yossi Fischer, tourism expert, June 2017. It is very difficult to accurately estimate the figures of Israeli tourists entering Morocco, since many of them do so with a foreign passport (American or European, or even Moroccan).

²⁷ Dror Marom, "[Royal Air Maroc Renewed efforts after the elections to operate direct flights to Israel](#)," *Globes*, 30 May 1999.

²⁸ Conversation with Raphael Balulu, director and independent film maker, 8 July 2017.

Education, research, and academia - In the area of education there is a potential for an increase in Moroccan and Israeli delegation exchange, while expanding the target audiences, the areas of cooperation. For example, in June 2016, the Biton committee, appointed by the Israel Ministry of Education, recommended the dispatch of high-school delegations to study tours in Morocco.²⁹ There is also a potential for expanding cooperation between institutions of higher education and research and policy institutions, universities and non-academic institutions, that deal with areas such as foreign relations, security, medicine, agriculture, economics, immigrant absorption, community development and the legacy of Moroccan Jewry. There is also potential to expand cooperation between students, researchers and lecturers from both countries through participation in EU exchange programs such as Erasmus Mundus³⁰ and Tempus.³¹

D. Existing cooperation between Israel and Morocco

This section includes a mapping of the various types of cooperation that has been taking place in recent years between Israel and Morocco, divided into four main areas: political, security, economic and business and civic.

The mapping reveals many diverse and surprising partnerships, despite the fact that since 2000, Israel and Morocco have not maintained official diplomatic relations. Bilateral cooperation is conducted directly whereas multilateral cooperation is mediated through third countries or international organizations and forums. Much of the cooperation takes place behind the scenes, and most of those involved prefer to be discrete, in order to enable their continued existence. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the mapping presented in this section does not fully reflect the current ongoing cooperation.

The attempt to fill in the gaps through interviews with experts turned out to be particularly challenging. Moroccans and Israelis involved in cooperation between the two countries were not willing to be interviewed openly. Morocco prefers to play down the scope of its cooperation with Israel, therefore does not publish official statistics on the subject. Israel publishes few statistics on the relations with Morocco, which may even be misleading, since most of the cooperation between the two countries is sponsored by private non-Israeli companies or even done secretly, and therefore most of it is not documented.

It is possible that these challenges in collecting the data explain why almost no in-depth studies of Israel-Morocco relations have been published since the second intifada. Nevertheless, the proposed mapping is based on a combination of Israeli, Moroccan, Arab and international media sources, as well as various reports and interviews with experts (mainly Israelis).³²

²⁹ Shachar Chai, "[Biton Committee Recommendations: visiting the tombs of the Righteous and students traveling to Morocco](#)," *Ynet*, 7 July 2016.

³⁰ European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, for more details see [here](#).

³¹ The objective of the Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies is to encourage cooperation in the field of higher education between institutions of higher education in the EU and institutions of higher education among the countries participating in the program, including Israel and Morocco. For more details, see the program's [website](#).

³² Another example of the difficulty in obtaining data relates to the movement of people between the two countries - the Central Bureau of Statistics does not provide data on Israelis visiting Morocco. In fact, this figure is particularly difficult to obtain because it is not possible to know how many Israelis are entering Morocco with a foreign passport and who through a pre-arranged visa. In addition, the absence of direct flights between Morocco and Israel makes it difficult to monitor Israelis who flew all the way to Morocco via a connection.

1. Political cooperation

In the absence of official diplomatic relations between the two countries, open political cooperation is limited to meetings between senior officials from both countries, with the participation of multilateral organizations and the adoption of international agreements. Israel and Morocco maintain diplomatic relations through the UN and its institutions, the NATO Alliance, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM),³³ the EuroControl Organization,³⁴ the Barcelona Process (since 1995) and the European Neighborhood Policy (as of 2004).³⁵

In international forums, the relations between Israel and Morocco range from refraining from contact on the part of Moroccan officials and cautious attempts of rapprochement. Morocco is moving between its desire to find its place in the international community to increase its internal stability, and having an official and open interaction with Israel, which could provoke criticism in Morocco and abroad. In November 2016, Morocco hosted the 22nd UN Climate Conference (COP22) and was asked to raise the flag of Israel along with the other flags of the UN member states. Multiple demonstrations broke out throughout the kingdom, claiming that raising the Israeli flag meant official recognition of Israel. Moroccan Foreign Minister – Salahuddin Mazar – responded by saying that "all nations are welcome at UN meetings" and that the struggle against climate change "binds all governments" The Israeli flag continued to fly until the end of the conference.³⁶

An interesting incident took place in October 2017, during a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean held in the Moroccan Parliament in Rabat. The meeting was attended by MK Amir Peretz, who serves as the organization's vice president, which provoked protests from one of the Moroccan parliamentarians, who shouted at him: "you were the Israeli defense minister and you are an unwanted guest here". Majali Wahaba, a former member of the Knesset and member of the Israeli delegation, came to his defense and told the Moroccan MP that "Amir Peretz is Moroccan, his father and mother are Moroccans, he was born here and you have no right to attack him". Moreover, members of the Palestinian delegation objected the behavior of the protestor and publicly demonstrated it. Finally, the Moroccan representative, who served as chairman of the assembly, summed up the incident with a softening message and said, "this minority cannot represent the

³³ See the [website](#) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

³⁴ In February 2017, Israel joined the EuroControl organization and together with Morocco they are the only two non-European member states. The agreement allows Israel for the first time to enjoy a variety of new aviation services offered by the EuroControl organization, such as the advanced design of the air transport system and its safe and efficient management, management and advertising of aviation information, and direct contact with the hub that manages the airspace in Europe.

³⁵ The official cooperation under the European Neighborhood Policy started with the Barcelona process, which was signed in November 1995. All EU member states as well as the 12 Mediterranean countries, including Morocco, Israel and the Palestinian Authority participate in this process. Its objective is to replicate the European peace model for the Mediterranean basin while enhancing stability and encouraging regional economic development by fostering democratization and protecting human rights, establishing a free trade zone and developing civil societies and cooperation between them. The total budget planned for investment in projects in the Southern Neighborhood in the years 2014-2020 is 7.5-9.2 billion Euros. The program is funded by the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI).

³⁶ For details see: "[International activities in the 20th Knesset](#)," *The Knesset*; "[Hundreds Protest against Israeli Flag in Morocco](#)," *Ynetnews*, 10 November 2016; Another example occurred at the beginning of 2016 when Morocco voted in favor of Israel, which was running for the chairmanship of the UN Legislation Committee. The opposition on the part of the Action Group for Palestine did not wait long, which demanded the Moroccan government to explain this step, for more details see Urfa al-Bandari, "[Israeli-Moroccan Relations: Enemies in Public, Friends in Secret](#)," *Raseef 22*, 6 November 2016 [Arabic].

parliament or the Moroccan people". Here, too, in the end, the official Morocco chose to host an international forum and pay the price of its relations with Israel. The reactions that this encounter provoked in the Moroccan parliament reflects the complex relations between Israel and Morocco, especially when the Israeli representatives are also Moroccans.³⁷

Although the international forums enable interaction between Israel and Morocco, the activity of the two countries in these forums led sometimes to diplomatic clashes. This was the case at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which met in June 2017 in Liberia. Following the announcement of Israel's participation in the conference, criticism was voiced by some of the member states. Morocco, which was supposed to attend the conference for the first time, canceled its participation at the last minute on the grounds that "the King does not want the first time Morocco is present at the conference would be under tension and controversy, and therefore wants to avoid it". Only after a few months did it turn out that Morocco's accession to the organization was anyway complex, and it possibly used Israel as an accuse in order to buy time, that would help Morocco gain better conditions to join the organization.³⁸

Another clash took place in the context of the EU, when in December 2015 Israel claimed that although the Sahara region was announced by the EU an occupied territory, the EU did not require the marking of products originating in that region, as it did with products originating from the settlements. Much to its dismay Morocco discovered that Israel is putting the sensitive and important issue of the Sahara under the spotlight, while comparing between the two cases.³⁹

Open and secret meetings between senior Moroccan and Israeli officials take place outside of Morocco and even in Morocco itself. Thus, for example, in September 2009, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman secretly met with his Moroccan counterpart Taieb Fassi Fihri after the UN General Assembly in New York. In December 2008 the Foreign Ministry Director-General Aaron Abramovich visited Rabat to explore the possibility of an official visit by then Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to Morocco. An official visit by an Israeli foreign minister to Morocco has not taken place since Silvan Shalom's visit in 2003.⁴⁰ Livni eventually visited Morocco in November 2009, when she headed the opposition. She was invited by the Amadeus Research Institute, and her visit provoked protests and hostile coverage by the media in Morocco and the Arab world.

In some cases, the protest against visits of senior Israeli officials in Morocco led to the cancellation of planned visits. This was the case in October 2010 and May 2015, when Shimon Peres expressed his intention to visit Morocco as part of Israel's participation in

³⁷ Ohad Chemo, "[Documentation: Amir Peretz you are a war criminal](#)," *Mako*, 8 October 2017.

³⁸ [His Majesty the King Wants His First Presence at ECOWAS Summit not to Take Place in a Context of Controversy](#), *Kingdom of Morocco – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*, 6 January 2017.

³⁹ Tibon, *ibid.* Other diplomatic incidents occurred during 2017, expressing insensitivity and lack of understanding the Moroccan culture and politics. MK Zuhair Bahlul called on the Israeli government to assume responsibility for the holy sites of Moroccan Jews in Morocco and led to a diplomatic incident: Marissa Newman, "[When a Muslim MK Beseeched Israel to Fund a Moroccan Synagogue](#)," *The Times of Israel*, 30 November 2016. In May 2017, Ayoub Kara published in the social networks a picture of him meeting with the Prime Minister of the Sahrawi Republic, Abdelkader Omar: Raoul Wootliff, "[Morocco Complains to Israel about Minister's Photo with Rival Leader](#)," *The Times of Israel*, 22 June 2017.

⁴⁰ Ali Amar, "[Maroc, le Partenaire Discret d'Israël](#)," *Slate Afrique*, 11 September 2011; Barak Ravid, "[Livni in Talks to Hold Official Visit to Morocco in the Coming Weeks](#)," *Ha'aretz*, 8 December 2008.

international economic forums, but in both cases, Mohammed VI did not show any willingness to meet with him during his visit which led to the cancellation of the visits by Peres himself. Moroccan public opinion, the Arab states and Palestinian officials drew a clear red line against his visit. It is possible that if he was a Moroccan Jew, it would have been more difficult for Moroccan public opinion to rally a consensus against the visit, as happened in MK Peretz's visit to the Moroccan parliament in October 2017.⁴¹

2. Security cooperation

Security cooperation continued even after the severance of official diplomatic relations with the outbreak of the second intifada. Most of it is conducted secretly and therefore it is difficult to outline the scale and character of cooperation in this field other than to base it on public foreign sources. Today, according to these sources, security cooperation involves mostly in the exchange of intelligence information and the trade of weapons. Thus, for example, the Mossad opened an office in Morocco as early as 1963, and since then the secret ties between the intelligence services have continued. In a report published in 2014 by the British Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which oversees British defense exports, it is claimed that Israel sold to Morocco electronic warfare, communications and control systems. The arms deals are carried out usually through a third party, thus in March 2013, for example, according to foreign sources, the Moroccan Air Force acquired three Heron drones, which were transferred from Israel to France, painted in the colors of the kingdom and sent to Morocco. The drones were equipped with advanced Israeli systems and equipment.⁴²

3. Economic and business cooperation

Foreign trade - Trade between Israel and Morocco is very limited. In recent years, exports to Morocco have not exceeded 0.04 percent of Israel's total exports, and included mainly agricultural product and communications and medical equipment. Imports from Morocco were even more limited and did not exceed 0.03 percent of all imports into Israel, and included mainly olives, sardines and products for the automotive industry.⁴³ The main reason for the low trade volumes is the influence of the prevalent position in Arab countries that opposes cooperation with Israel.⁴⁴ The limited foreign trade between Israel and Morocco is possible thanks to the mediation of third countries and the removal of Israeli trademarks from the goods.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Nir Yahav, "[Report: The Arab States foiled Peres's visit to Morocco](#)," *Walla!News*, 20 October 2010; Nir Hasson, "[Moroccan King Mohammed VI to Peres: I Will Not Meet You](#)," *Haaretz*, 17 October 2010; Another case occurred in May 2015, when Morocco canceled Shimon Peres' invitation to an international conference in Marrakech: Dalit Halevi, " [Hamas welcomes the cancellation of Peres' visit to Morocco](#)," *Arutz Sheva*, 4 May 2015.

⁴² This office is currently split into several departments, see the website of the [Export Control Joint Unit](#). The unit is responsible for overseeing defense exports in the kingdom and follows exports worldwide. Shai Levy, "[The Surprising Collaborations of the IDF](#)," *Mako*, 30 January 2014; Shai Levy, "[From Syria to Yemen: This is how Israeli Arms Reach the Arab Countries](#)," *Mako*, 10 September 2015.

⁴³ [Table 16.5](#), *Central Bureau of Statistics*, 2016.

⁴⁴ The Arab boycott of Israel began officially in a resolution adopted by the Arab League Council on 2 December 1945, in Cairo. Since then there have been changes in terms of scope and participating countries. Today, this is a largely symbolic boycott, that enjoys high public awareness. Egypt and Jordan, who signed a peace agreement with Israel declared that they are not bound by this boycott. For further information, see Martin A. Weiss, [Arab League Boycott of Israel](#), *Congressional Research Service*, 25 August 2017.

⁴⁵ Barak Ravid, "[The King severed relations, the King will renew them?](#)," *Haaretz*, 24 July 2009.

A number of international shipping companies such as Green Shipping, and Maersk, operate trade routes linking the Israeli seaports (Haifa and Ashdod) with the Moroccan seaports (Casablanca and Tangier). In addition, containers of the Israeli shipping company ZIM are being shipped between Spain, Portugal and Morocco routinely.⁴⁶ Foreign trade is constrained by the existing political circumstances which sometimes come to the fore, such as the incident in June 2016, when the Moroccan parliament demanded an explanation for the Moroccan markets being flooded with Israeli Majhul dates during Ramadan. Mohamad Abou, the Moroccan minister was in charge of foreign trade at that time, denied any direct trade with Israel.⁴⁷ Another example relates to the activities of ZIM in Morocco, which used to have a permanent agent in Casablanca. The agent's activity was recently halted by the company, according to a ZIM representative, following the opposition of anti-normalization movements in Morocco.⁴⁸

Tourism - Morocco opened its gates to Israeli tourism in the early '80s in response to an increasing demand by Israelis of Moroccan origins to visit the country. At first, only Moroccan Israelis who held Moroccan passports were allowed to visit Morocco. In the 1990s, Morocco allowed entry to all Israelis who wished to visit it, which is not surprising, as this was when Berdugo, then the president of the Jewish community in Casablanca, was appointed Minister of Tourism of Morocco. His appointment indicated how important it was for King Hassan II to preserve the Jewish-Moroccan bond.⁴⁹ Since then, every Israeli tourist interested in visiting Morocco is required to apply for a visa for a stay of up to 15 days. Currently, between 25,000 and 45,000 Israelis visit Morocco each year. However, tourists from Morocco, Arab and Muslim countries arrive in Israel through the airport and through the border crossings with Jordan. The number of tourists from Morocco to Israel was only 3,200 in 2015, though the number is slowly increasing. There are several main reasons for the low numbers of tourists from Morocco: anti-normalization movements, general concerns, financial difficulties, a complex visa application process, and the fear of an Israeli stamp in a passport. In early 2013 Israel started allowing entry to its territory without stamping the passports of Moroccans, which made it easier for tourists to travel into the country.⁵⁰

Agriculture - Agricultural cooperation between Israel and Morocco is limited but very important. In terms of agricultural commodities, Israel mainly exports to Morocco seeds of cherry tomatoes, peppers, dates and agricultural equipment.⁵¹ Morocco, for its part, exports to Israel mainly olives and sardines. It seems that even small volumes of trade are provoking opposition in Morocco and bind the Moroccan government to address it officially.⁵²

In addition to agricultural produce and the revenue it generates, agriculture is one of the most important economic sectors in Morocco, providing 44 percent of jobs for the local labor force. This helps to reduce unemployment rate, which is one of Morocco's main objectives. The Moroccan government recognized the economic potential in liberalizing the agriculture

⁴⁶ For more information, see the company's web site [Zim Integrated Shipping Services Ltd.](http://www.zim.com)

⁴⁷ "[Morocco denies having business relations with Israel](#)," RT, 28 June 2016 [Arabic].

⁴⁸ Phone conversation with Zim Representative, January 2018.

⁴⁹ Serge Berdugo was the first Jewish minister to serve in the Moroccan government since Leon Benzaken's tenure as minister of tourism in the first government established after Morocco became independent. See Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Israel and Morocco: A Special Relationship," *The Maghreb Review* 21, 1996.

⁵⁰ [Tourism 2015](#), CBS, 2015.

⁵¹ Private sector companies are not so willing to provide information about their activities – for further details see: Noam Nir, [Israel-Morocco: Le Grand Business](#), *The King and I*, 28 October 2008.

⁵² For example, the opposition in Morocco following the import of dates from Israel during the month of Ramadan: Hassan Al-Ashraf, [Morocco Activists Outraged over Israeli Dates Imported for Ramadan](#), *Al Arabiya News*, 26 July 2012.

sector and in 2008 published a new strategy for agricultural development. The goal of the program is to encourage international and local investment as a means to create additional jobs, introduce new technologies and encourage integration into the global economy.⁵³

These processes, which began before 2008, attracted Israeli farmers (some were evacuated from Gush Katif) who sought better conditions for agricultural development. They established agricultural farms in Morocco and worked as consultants, thanks to the extensive professional knowledge they acquired in organic farming, and the development and implementation of agricultural technology such as greenhouses, drip irrigation, and pest control.⁵⁴ The agricultural sector not only provides opportunities for cooperation, but also creates a competition on exporting agricultural produce to attractive markets in Europe, America and Asia, due to the unique geo-strategic and inter-continental location of the two countries. In this competition, Morocco enjoys an advantage over Israel in terms of manufacturing costs, wages and transportation, which allows it to export at lower prices.⁵⁵

4. Cooperation between civil societies

There are numerous surprising and fruitful civil society partnerships between Israelis and Moroccans which are made possible thanks to three main factors: first, the independence of the civil societies in both countries and their relative freedom of action within and outside both countries. Global processes have led to an increase in the power of civil society worldwide, as well as in Morocco and Israel.⁵⁶

Since its inception, Mohammed VI has been promoting a liberal civil society in Morocco. Currently there are some 120,000 civil society organizations working on issues such as democracy, women's rights, advanced medicine, human rights, promoting Amazigh representation in Morocco and promoting trade organizations;⁵⁷ Second, the special connection and intensive human movement between Israel and Morocco and the ability to maintain it, encourage and preserve these partnerships. The amendment to the Moroccan constitution of July 2011, according to which the Hebraic culture is part of the Moroccan national heritage, facilitated the activities of civil society organizations that deal with Judaism in Morocco. This is something which is not seen anywhere else in the Arab and Muslim world; Third, the relations between Morocco and its diaspora in Israel and other Moroccan diasporas in the world, are based on shared Moroccan identity and values. Both Morocco and Israel cultivate a strong bond between the homelands and their diaspora. In Morocco, the concept of nationalism as an inclusive meta-identity, allows the Moroccan people to enjoy a strong sense of partnership and belonging. In other words, every citizen is first of all a Moroccan while the ethnic, religious and other identities are secondary. In addition, Moroccan nationality is inherited up to four generations after the emigration. This enables, Israelis of second, third and fourth generations of Moroccan origin to apply for Moroccan citizenship.

⁵³ "[Morocco – Agricultural Sector](#)," export.gov, 25 October 2017.

⁵⁴ Ruti Krichman, "[Israeli Orchardists in the Orchard s of Morocco](#)", *Et Hadar*, April 2013; Amiram Bareket, "[Gush Katif settlers set up greenhouses in Africa](#)", *Walla!News*, 4 June 2006.

⁵⁵ Israel sees the rise in Moroccan agricultural exports to Europe as one of the direct causes for the decline in Israeli exports to the Moroccan market. See Moshe Glantz, "[Why did Agricultural Exports Drop from Israel to the World?](#)" *Ynet*, 5 January 2016; And Ra'anana Cohen, "[Speech by the former Chairman of the Wholesale Market Company Raanan Cohen](#)", *Made in Israel: Wholesale Market of Israel Ltd.*, 2013.

⁵⁶ "[The Future Role of Civil Society](#)," *World Economic Forum*, January 2013.

⁵⁷ Vish Sakthivel, "[Beyond Islamists and Autocrats: Morocco - Prospects for Civil Society](#)," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 2015; Essaadi Mostafa, "[Civic Freedom Monitor: Morocco](#)," *ICNL*, 1 June 2017.

Cooperation between the civil societies of Morocco and Israel is particularly prominent in the following areas:

Preservation of the Judeo-Moroccan heritage - In recent years many Jewish heritage sites have been renovated including synagogues, cemeteries, Jewish schools, and the streets of the Mellah quarter (Jewish quarters). There are many parties involved in such rehabilitation projects of Jewish heritage sites, including the King of Morocco,⁵⁸ leaders from the Jewish community in Morocco and the Diaspora,⁵⁹ institutions and civil society organizations,⁶⁰ and Israelis of Moroccan origin. The Judeo-Moroccan heritage lies at the heart of the cooperation on civil matters between Israel and Morocco. This allows expanding the relations between the countries much further in comparison Israel's relations with other Arab countries. There are two complementary explanations for the Moroccan desire and efforts to preserve the Jewish heritage: first, Morocco still has deep feelings and longing for the Jews who have almost disappeared from its landscape. This is a sense of a real and genuine partnership, and some Moroccans even believe that the Jews will return to Morocco and that their departure was a tragic mistake. Second, preservation of the Moroccan Jewish heritage is done for pragmatic reasons and out of a desire to improve Morocco's image in the international community and in the West. Morocco's objective is to improve relations with the EU and to enlist the Jewish lobby in the US to safeguard the Moroccan interests in the Sahara region.⁶¹

Delegation exchanges - In recent years we have witnessed the exchange of many delegations between Morocco and Israel in a variety of areas. Israeli delegations visited Morocco on study tours, some of which were of a social and political nature, and included meetings with officials in Morocco. Delegations from Morocco visit Israel several times a year. For example, in November-December 2016, three Moroccan delegations from the educational and communications sectors visited Israel.⁶² In June 2018, three civil society delegations from Morocco also arrived in Israel. Another example can be found in the field of sports in general and specifically in judo. For example, in March 2018, following the victory of Timna Nelson Levi in the Grand Prix at Agadir, the Israeli flag was flying in public and the Israeli anthem was played.⁶³

⁵⁸ The King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, was present at a festive ceremony after the renovation of the Ettedgui Synagogue in Casablanca: [With a lot of respect](#), *Davar Rishon*, 21 December 2016; Mohammed VI visits the Mellah streets of Marrakech after restoring the original names of the streets of the neighborhood dating back to its Jewish period: JTA, [Historic Jewish Neighborhood in Marrakech to Have Original Name Restored](#), *Haaretz*, 5 January 2017; Renovation and restoration of the Slat al-Fassiyine synagogue in Fez: [Complete Restoration of the Slat El Fassiyine Synagogue](#), *Aladdin Project*.

⁵⁹ Worth mentioning Mr. Andre Azoulay, Senior Advisor to the King, Serge Berdugo, President of the Jewish Community of Morocco, Jacky Kadosh, Rabbi of the Jewish community of Marrakech and Essaouira, and the late Simon Levi, who was very active.

⁶⁰ Einat Levi, [Casablanca: Things Seen from Here](#), *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, 18 June 2017. [The Museum of Moroccan Jewry](#), the first to be established in an Arab country, which serves as a bridge and as a cultural attraction for visitors from Morocco, the Arab world and Israel.

⁶¹ [Moroccan Jews Reportedly Protest UN View on 'Occupied' Sahara](#), JTA, 9 May 2016.

⁶² The first delegation came at the invitation of the Yad Vashem Museum, and included educators who came to participate in Holocaust studies in order to teach the subject in Morocco. The second delegation arrived at the invitation of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included journalists, in order to improve Israel's image in the Moroccan media. The third arrived at the invitation of the Tikkun Movement and included social activists, in order to encourage the rapprochement between Israel and Morocco. See Herb Keinon, ["Is A Growing Interest in Israel on the Rise in Morocco?"](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 30 November 2016; [International Activities in the 20th Knesset](#), *The Knesset*, 30 November 2016.

⁶³ Einat Levi, [the Routinization Effect: Why the Boycott of Israel Failed in Morocco](#), *Maariv*, 22 March 2018.

The frequent delegation exchanges stir a harsh debate in the Moroccan and Arab media and provoke criticism from anti-normalization movements such as the Moroccan Observer Against Normalization. To date, the continuous exchange of delegations turned mutual visits into a routine, meaning that there is a kind of "routinization effect". The Moroccan media continues to cover those visits, but they are not considered as a new thing anymore and the criticism is less harsh.

Music, cinema, and art - Many collaborations in the areas of music, cinema and art take place between Israeli and Moroccan civil societies. Israeli and Moroccan artists and composers meet in festivals in Morocco and around the world, such as the Symphoniat concert in Marrakesh.⁶⁴ Occasionally, as is the case when there is an escalation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the anti-normalization movements in Morocco raise their voice and attract the attention to the cooperation between the countries. This was the case with the film "Tinghir-Jerusalem: Echoes from the Mellah", released in 2013. The film, which was shot in Morocco and Israel, was screened dozens of times in Morocco, Israel and around the world. The film aroused many objections in Morocco arguing that it was normalization, nevertheless it won prizes and was even screened on the Moroccan state channel M2.⁶⁵

Education and research - There is cooperation between educational institutions, researchers (independent or affiliated to research and policy institutes), internship programs, and more.⁶⁶ For example, in April 2015, the Galilee College in Nahalal, the al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane and the EuroMed University of Fes started working on a joint environmental protection program in the Mediterranean. The program included two semesters, one in Israel and one in Morocco. Two main factors enabled this cooperation: first, the fact that the Galilee College is a private educational institution; and second, the fact that the main funding for such initiatives comes from international institutions and forums such as the World Bank, the EU, the World Health Organization, and the UN Environment Program.⁶⁷

Research cooperation is often facilitated by academic institutions in third countries such as the US, Canada and European countries. The joint research topics deal with Jewish-Moroccan heritage, Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco, Amazigh identity, community development, environmental protection, and more.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ In December 2016, the Symphoniat concert was held in Marrakech, which was attended by singers and artists from Israel, and received media coverage on Morocco's M2 national channel: [Symphoniat Project – Morocco - 2M Mag Report](#), YouTube, 21 April 2016.

⁶⁵ Including opposition on the part of the Moroccan communications minister, who categorically boycotted the 2014 Tangier National Film Festival because the film participated. For further details, see: Einat Levi, [Tangier-Jerusalem: The Story of Complex Identity](#), *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, 5 September 2013; Karima Rhanem, [Kamal Hachkar: Muslim-Jewish Coexistence Should Be Taught in Moroccan Schools](#), *Morocco World News*, 26 June 2013.

⁶⁶ One of the participants of the [GLOCAL](#) program at the Hebrew University, Marwa Taher Natsheh, set out for a four-month internship at the [High Atlas Foundation](#) in the Marrakech region. In 2017, another student from the program interned in a Moroccan NGO. To read the blog written by a student specializing in the organization, see: Marwa Natsheh, [Visiting Akrich and Aboghlo Women's Cooperative: Shared Stories and New Perceptions](#), *High Atlas Foundation*.

⁶⁷ [Galilee College Puts Peace into Practice](#), *The World University Rankings*, 16 January 1998.

⁶⁸ Among Israeli researchers, it is worth mentioning (late) Prof. Moshe Gershowitz, Prof. Bruce Maddi-Weizmann, Dr. Orit Vaknin Yekutieli, Michael Lasker, Yaron Tsur and others. On the Moroccan side, Prof. Mohammed Kanbib, Dr. Samir Ben-Layashi, Prof. Omar Baum, who won an award for his research from Ben-Gurion University in July 2017, and others.

In recent years we have witnessed an exchange of Israeli and Moroccan students between the two countries. A number of students from Morocco have studied and are still studying in academic institutions in Israel, such as Ben-Gurion University and the Arava Institute. Although there are currently no Israeli students studying in academic institutions in Morocco, Israeli students have recently begun to intern in Moroccan civil society organizations in the field of community development.⁶⁹ Although joint educational programs are not common, they are diverse and their very existence reflects the great potential for cooperation between the civil societies of both countries.

Promoting political processes and creating channels of dialogue between Israel, the Arab states and the Palestinians - Civil society organizations in Morocco, Israel and the Moroccan Diaspora are sometimes involved in facilitating political moves and creating channels of dialogue between Israel, the Arab states and the Palestinians. For example, in February 2016, Mohammed VI gave his blessing to the Chair of the World Federation of Moroccan Jewry, Sam Ben Shitrit, to advance a meeting between Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas, and that same month a delegation from the Federation met with Abbas and his delegation in Ramallah.⁷⁰ This meeting continues a trend that began in the 1970s with the establishment of the "Identity and Dialogue" movement, one of the first groups in Morocco to call for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.⁷¹

E. Israel, Morocco, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Over the years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a barrier that prevents the relations between Israel and Morocco from fulfilling their potential. For a short period of time, when a significant Israeli-Palestinian peace process took place in the 1990s, relations between the two countries became warmer. Despite the Israeli-Moroccan friendship, Morocco supports the Palestinians in their struggle for a state of their own alongside the State of Israel, due to its commitment as a member of the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In fact, it was King Hassan II who promoted the Arab League summit of October 1974, which recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians, and since 1975, Morocco has served as Chair of the Jerusalem Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Since the issue of Jerusalem lies at the heart of the every Israeli-Palestinian negotiation, Morocco may become relevant to this debate by virtue of its role.⁷²

Morocco is relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it can potentially become a mediator, thanks to its relative neutrality, its special character as a meeting point between East and West, and the fact that it enjoys the trust of the parties to the conflict. Thanks to all

⁶⁹ The interns stay in Morocco for several months and are accompanied by the university in Israel and the hosting organization in Morocco. Given the sensitivity, and out of the fear that the Israeli and Moroccan students might be targeted by anti-normalization movements, I refrained from revealing their full details

⁷⁰ The meeting between Sam Ben-Shitrit and his representatives and Mahmoud Abbas and his representatives took place in February 2016 with the participation of twenty ministers from the Palestinian Authority. For further information, see: Raoul Wootliff, [Morocco's King Dispatches Jewish Aide to Push Israeli-Palestinian Talks](#), *The Times of Israel*, 15 February, 2016.

⁷¹ Gidon Levi, [The Insights of Gidon Levi While Visiting Morocco](#), *Haaretz*, 30 April 2010.

⁷² Morocco's role is revealed in various decisions of Islamic institutions, such as the 37th Convention of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in May 2010. The [minutes of the meeting](#) included Article 17 (p. 10) emphasizing Morocco's role: "Affirms its support for the efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chairman of al-Quds Committee, in supporting the City of al-Quds al-Shareef, in preserving its Arab and Islamic identity and in supporting its steadfastness in confronting the Judaization attempt that they are faced with".

of this, Morocco has become an involved player in the peace process. This was especially important for Hassan II, who aspired to strengthen Morocco's position as a mediator in the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the negotiations between Israel and Egypt, it was Morocco that assisted and hosted the historic meeting between the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Hassan al-Tuhami. Morocco even hosted the summit meeting in Fes in September 1982, in which the Fes Plan for a negotiated settlement in the Middle East was presented.⁷³ Morocco was also involved in the Oslo process. Morocco entered the process after the process was already in progress and became more significant after the visit of Rabin and Peres in Rabat in September 1993. In October 1994, it hosted an economic conference (the Casablanca Conference), which declared the end of the Arab boycott of Israel.⁷⁴

It is clear that since the outbreak of the second intifada in October 2000 and the rise of Mohammed VI to power, Morocco's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been significantly reduced. The new King preferred to focus first on the domestic challenges of Morocco and to establish his rule from within. The increasing power of the political Islam in the kingdom, which is reflected in the victory of the Justice and Development Party in the last two elections held in 2011 and in 2016, made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict less significant for Moroccans. The King understood that from a political point of view, any public discussion on the subject could strengthen the Islamist camp and erode his authority. If considering also the stagnation that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has undergone in recent years and the reduced public attention it receives, it is easier to understand the King's position.

The instability in the Middle East since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, along with other considerations, led the King to realize that the Middle East and the inter-Arab swamp cannot satisfy Morocco's major interests – i.e. its continued economic development and reinforcing Morocco's sovereignty in the Sahara region. Therefore, Morocco reduces its involvement in the Arab regional system and continues to strengthen its ties with Africa and the West. This trend further distances it from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷⁵ An analysis of Mohammed VI's speeches reaffirms this trend. In the period between April 2012 and January 2018, Israel was mentioned only in 12 out of 111 official speeches that the King delivered (about 11 percent). In 11 out of the 12 speeches in which Israel was mentioned, it was mentioned on average four times per speech, mostly in a negative or a neutral context and without any positive comment.

The speech delivered by Mohammed VI on 29 November 2017, was unique for the fact that Israel was mentioned 22 times. Special attention was given to Trump's declaration of the American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the events of November 29 and the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He expressed his concern over the violation of the status quo in Jerusalem and the situation of the Palestinians, urged Israel to stop construction projects in the settlements, and the violation of international conventions. However, he called for Israel to return to the negotiating table, and for the

⁷³ Unknown author, [Fez Plan of Action](#), *the Knesset website*.

⁷⁴ Marvine Howe, *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges*, Oxford University Press, 2005; Segev, *ibid*.

⁷⁵ The focus on African and Western countries is out of the perception that these are the communities that can best address Morocco's main political and economic needs and its interests in the Sahara region. For further details, see Ayelet Levy, [Morocco: Return to the African Union and the Continuing Departure from the Arab League](#), *ibid*; Aziz El Yaakoubi, [Morocco, Citing Arab Disunity, Says Will not Host Summit](#), *Reuters*, 19 February 2016.

involvement of the international community, while expressing support for previous peace initiatives based on the two-state solution, such as the Quartet's road map and the Arab peace initiative.⁷⁶

Another case in which Mohammed VI officially condemned Israel took place in August 2017, in his capacity as Chairman of the Jerusalem Committee. In those days, the number of violent incidents between Israel and the Palestinians increased in Jerusalem, and Mohammed VI sent an emphatic letter to the UN Secretary-General in which he issued a protest against Israeli activity in Jerusalem in general and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in particular. He described Israeli activity as unacceptable and as one that is trying to change the situation and create facts on the ground. The King called on the international community to take determined steps to force Israel to put an end to its provocations, which, he said, could ignite extremism, tension and violence in the whole region.⁷⁷

Anti-normalization: The glass ceiling of Israel-Morocco relations - The continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reduces the scope of cooperation between Israel and Morocco, and does not allow both countries to realize the full potential of their relations. One of the reasons for this is the campaigns of movements and organizations opposed to normalize relations between Israel and the Arab states. The campaigns of such movements in Morocco began in 1968, with the establishment of the Moroccan Association for the Support of the Palestinian People, which continues to this day. Over the years, additional movements have been established, such as the National Action Organization for Palestine in Morocco, which was founded in 1998 against the backdrop of the Oslo process; the BDS Maroc, founded in 2005 and headed by Zion Asidon, a Jewish-Moroccan political activist living in Tangier; and the Moroccan Observer against Normalization, which was established in January 2013 and coordinates between several organizations and movements active in this field. The Moroccan Observer against Normalization is the most important organization today led by the opposition to normalization between Morocco and Israel, headed by Khaled Sufyani, an activist of Amazigh origin. This organization and others are investing their efforts in raising funds, organizing conferences and seminars to raise awareness of the Palestinian struggle, lobbying the Moroccan Parliament and outside Morocco, organizing large-scale demonstrations in support of the Palestinian struggle, and boycotting any cooperation with Israel. All of these reduce the scope of cooperation between Israel and Morocco.

It is not always possible to prove the effect of the anti-normalization movements activity on actual and potential cooperation between the countries. Morocco's decision-makers refrain from admitting that they are influenced by these movements, which in many cases have essentially a deterrent effect. The actual influence of the movements varies according to the areas of cooperation. It seems that their activity is more effective against open and official bilateral cooperation, especially in the political and economic spheres. For example, cancelling Peres's visits to Morocco in 2010 and 2015, apparently in reaction to the pressure exerted by the anti-normalization movements that followed the media coverage of the planned visits.

The impact of the opposition to normalization decreases when it is directed at multilateral cooperation within the framework of international forums. Thus, for example, the Israeli flag

⁷⁶ HM King Mohammed VI, [HM the King Sends Message to Chairman of UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People](#), Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Culture & Communication – Royal Speeches, 29 November, 2017.

⁷⁷ Unknown Author, [OIC Commends Moroccan King's Efforts as Chairman of Al Quds Committee](#), *The North Africa Post*, 2 August 2017.

was flying at the COP22 climate conference, which was held in Marrakech in November 2016, despite the protest of anti-normalization movements. The failure of the protest was apparently due to Morocco's desire to improve its position within the international community and its readiness to pay the price for it.

In the civil sphere, the influence of anti-normalization movements changes based on events related with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the inter-Arab relations and Moroccan domestic politics. For example, the participation of Israeli artists in festivals in Morocco is often canceled during periods of escalation in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The organizers of the festivals fear that they will be the target of anti-normalization protests. On the other hand, in a relatively calm period, as in September 2017, the protest against the concert of the Israeli singer Noam Vazana in Tangier did not prevent her from performing.⁷⁸

While the boycott movements in Morocco do not prevent the cooperation between Morocco and Israel from happening, they certainly succeed in limiting it. Their main strength lies in the extensive media coverage they receive and their ability to shape public opinion as a result thereof. Moreover, these movements have a very strong lobby in the trade unions (mainly among the jurists), and they succeed in mobilizing the Moroccan public for an ad hoc protest against new initiatives that are reported. In the end, they do not prevent cooperation altogether, but limit it and prevent Israel and Morocco from realizing the full potential of their relationship.

In conclusion, it appears that since the rise of Mohammed VI to power, Morocco has focused on its domestic challenges and less on issues related to the inter-Arab and Middle Eastern systems. Its attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of avoidance and caution. The decision-makers in Morocco do not publicly comment about the conflict unless they are forced to do so. Since the outbreak of the second intifada, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been an inhibitor to fulfilling the potential for cooperation between Israel and Morocco. The main reasons being the public opinion in Morocco and the Arab world in general, which supports the Palestinian cause and the anti-normalization movements. The degree of influence of the anti-normalization movements is greater when it comes to overt, bilateral and official cooperation (which is more common with Morocco than with other Arab countries). On the other hand, covert, multilateral and unofficial cooperation continues to take place without significant disruption, on a varying scale depending on domestic and regional developments.

F. Summary

The current cooperation between Israel and Morocco is relatively large in scope and the interests underlying it are strong and durable. The main pillars of the cooperation are first and foremost the Jewish-Moroccan bond that has lasted for more than 2000 years and the security cooperation that emerged in the early 1960s and continues to this day. These two create a true sense of partnership and nurture deep mutual trust.

Since the failure of the Camp David summit and the outbreak of the second intifada in October 2000, Israel and Morocco have not maintained formal diplomatic relations. However, cooperation between them continues, despite the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in recent years, albeit to a limited extent. The most prominent

⁷⁸ Benjamin Weinthal, [BDS Morocco Attacks World-Renowned Israeli Singer In Tangier](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 October, 2017.

collaborations are confidential such as in the areas of security and intelligence, and openly and unofficially in areas such as tourism and civil society. There is more limited cooperation on official political and economic matters that take place openly, in part because of joint activity in regional and international forums. The recent extensive involvement of Morocco and Israel in Africa may point to another possible opportunity for cooperation, but further in-depth research is required to substantiate that.

The extensive travelling of Israelis and Moroccan between the countries, and the coverage it receives in the media and social networks in both countries, create a routinization effect and make the relations between them a matter of routine. The coverage, even if not always positive, encourages open and courageous public debate in Morocco on issues related to the relations with Israel and Israel's relations with the Arab and Muslim world. As a result, the Moroccan public is not as excited as ever about any cooperation between Morocco and Israel. The routinization effect gradually succeeds in expanding the boundaries of cooperation.

However, the realization of the potential for cooperation between Israel and Morocco depends on four main factors: (1) significant and positive progress in the political process with the Palestinians that will facilitate a more favorable Moroccan public opinion towards official diplomatic relations between Israel and Morocco; (2) choosing the "right" partners for the right purpose, considering the specifics of Moroccan politics and society. Israeli officials sometimes are forced to choose partners who do not represent the mainstream in Morocco. If Israel is interested in promoting significant cooperation with Morocco, Israel should ally with official partners who can "deliver the goods"; (3) leveraging designated populations in Israeli society and involving them in the efforts to enhance cooperation, including Jews of Moroccan and Arab origins and the Arab citizens of Israel. The contribution of Jews of Moroccan origin is based on the concept of Moroccan nationalism, according to which the Moroccan identity is almost eternal and therefore Jews of Moroccan origin living in Israel are perceived as Moroccans. Israel is also considered the second largest Moroccan Diaspora in the world after France; (4) combining the use of formal diplomacy channels and public and cultural diplomacy, based on the joint activities of officials and civil society actors in Morocco and Israel. This can be promoted also through digital diplomacy, which will include creating joint communities on social media, positive coverage in media channels and face-to-face meetings.

If Israel and Morocco succeed in realizing the potential for cooperation between them, it is expected to yield relations as profound and deep as their roots, thus show how far the connection between Israel and the countries of the region can go.

Annex

Table 1: Number of Moroccan tourists visiting Israel, 2008-2015⁷⁹

Year	Number of Moroccan tourists visiting Israel	Total number of tourists visiting Israel	Moroccan tourists out of all tourist (percent)
2015	3,200	2,799,400	0.14
2014	3,100	2,926,400	0.11
2013	2,500	2,961,700	0.08
2012	2,300	2,885,800	0.08
2011	2,400	2,820,200	0.09
2010	2,500	2,803,100	0.09
2009	2,300	2,321,400	0.10
2008	2,500	2,559,600	0.10

Table 2: Volumes of trade between Israel and Morocco, 1980-2015 (millions of USD)⁸⁰

Year	Total import from Morocco to Israel	Total import to Israel	Import from Morocco to Israel out of total import (percent)	Total export from Israel to Morocco	Total of export from Israel	Export from Israel to Morocco out of total export from Israel (percent)	Trade balance between Israel and Morocco ⁸¹
2015	15.6	62,071	0.03	23.0	64,062	0.04	+7.4
2014	6.6	72,341	0.01	10.6	68,967	0.02	+4.0
2010	5.2	59,199	0.01	13.2	58,415	0.02	+8.0
2000	1.6	35,749	0.00	8.4	31,403	0.03	+6.8
1990	0.0	15,325	0.00	0.0	11,926	0.0	0
1980	0.0	7,994	0.00	0.0	5,537	0.0	0

⁷⁹ Tourism 2015, *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ CBS, [Table 16.5](#), 2016.

⁸¹ Positive trade means that Israel imports from Morocco more than it exports to Morocco.

List of Interviewees

- Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University
- Michael Lasker, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Bar-Ilan University
- Lior Ben-Dor and Yafit Ezer, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Moshe Sarfati, Expert on Israeli tourism in Morocco
- Joseph Fischer, Tourism expert and owner of Vision Hospitality & Travel
- Raphael Balulu, Filmmaker
- Roni Sabag, Former owner of a water tanks manufacturing company which exported from Israel to Morocco
- Shimon Vanunu, An Israeli agricultural entrepreneur who is active in Morocco
- Moroccan entrepreneur (chose to remain anonymous)