

# ISRAEL: THE NEW PERIPHERAL STRATEGY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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## ABSTRACT

**T**he Soviet Union disappeared from the historical stage, leaving behind several newly independent states in Central Asia, and the political void was immediately filled with the struggle for the spheres of influence in the region. The main actors are the EU, the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, China, and India. Attracted by the political and socio-economic changes in Central Asia, Israel expected to consolidate its presence in the region to limit the influence of Iran, to help local countries establish moderate Muslim states and develop eco-

nomie relations and political dialog with them. This was seen as a step towards a stronger position in the Middle East.

In the last decade, Israel poured even more efforts into establishing relations with the Central Asian countries in the form of the recently developed the New Peripheral Strategy: improved relations with the moderate Muslim and non-Muslim states for coordinated struggle against radicalism, separatism, and terrorism. Guided by the need to consolidate its national security and being fully aware that this goal can be achieved

only if and when it breaks the circle of Islamic hostility around Israel, the latter adjusted its strategy and tactics accordingly. This makes a comprehensive study of the Central Asian trend of the New Peripheral Strategy highly topical.

The paper examines the specifics and the main elements of the Central Asian vector of Israel's foreign policy within the New Peripheral Strategy, and analyzes the

stages of the unfolding dialog between Israel and the Central Asian countries and the sides' mutual interest in bilateral cooperation.

The variants of Israel's approaches to individual countries have been analyzed to suggest a conclusion that Israel's successful and promising Central Asian policy has a good prospect of becoming a model of cooperation between Muslims and Jews.

**KEYWORDS:** *Israel, Central Asia, New Peripheral Strategy, the Middle East.*

## *Introduction*

Many states, Israel among them, have poured into the regions vacated by the Soviet Union to start discussions with the newly independent states. The official Basic Policy Guidelines of the 25th Government stated, in particular that “the dramatic changes on the international scene—the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War ... have created new and great possibilities”<sup>1</sup> for Israel to build up and consolidate its relations with the former Soviet republics, first and foremost, the Muslim republics.

Israel was interested in Central Asia primarily because the Muslim population of Central Asia “had no prejudices against the Jewish state.”<sup>2</sup> Israel interpreted the relations with the newly independent states as a chance to increase its influence in the Muslim world and ensure its national security. Israel feared that Iran might spread its ideological impact across the region, make the Central Asian republics part of the “circle of animosity” around the Jewish state<sup>3</sup> and threaten the Jewish communities in the Central Asian states.<sup>4</sup>

Israel's foreign policy efforts in Central Asia were supported by the United States, which planned to promote its interests in the region. In July 1992, they agreed to realize joint projects in Central Asia.<sup>5</sup>

This became one of the factors of greater interest of the local countries in Israel as a window to the West; closer relationships with the United States through Israel as an intermediary as well as its high scientific and technological development level was another. Confronted with political, social and economic problems, the Central Asian states needed assistance in the spheres of industry, pharmacol-

<sup>1</sup> “Basic Policy Guidelines of the 25th Government, July 1992,” *Foreign Policy. Historical Documents 1992-1994*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at [<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook9/Pages/2%20Basic%20Policy%20Guidelines%20of%20the%2025th%20Government-.aspx>], 24 January, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> V.I. Mesamed, *Israel v Tsentralnoy Azii: grezy i realnost*, Moscow, 2012, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> By the early 1990s, Israel maintained diplomatic relations with two Muslim states—Turkey and Egypt (see: *Ibid.*, p. 48).

<sup>4</sup> According to the 1989 population census, there were 19,900 Jews in Kazakhstan, about 11,000 in Tajikistan; about 3000 in Turkmenistan; 93,862 in Uzbekistan, and 6,000, in Kyrgyzstan (see: “Diaspora: regiony i strany,” *Elektronnaiia evreiskaia entsiklopedia*, available at [<https://eleven.co.il/diaspora/regions-and-countries/>], 24 January, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See: “State Department Statement on Joint U.S.-Israel Technical Assistance in Central Asia,” 30 July, 1992, *Foreign Policy. Historical Documents 1992-1994*.

ogy, medicine and higher education; they could not cope with the numerous crises on their own. Israel needed the region as a source of raw materials<sup>6</sup> and was ready to consolidate its economic interests there.

The dialog between Israel and the Central Asian states was promoted by highly qualified local Jews who had been moving to Israel since the late 1980s and who filled high posts by the time of the Soviet Union's disintegration.<sup>7</sup>

## The Dialog between Israel and the Central Asian Countries

Tel Aviv responded to the disintegration processes unfolding across the post-Soviet space with highly varied approaches carefully fine-tuned to each of the Central Asian states.<sup>8</sup> Uzbekistan's cotton and Kazakhstan's gold and energy fuels made them the two obvious priorities. Their two biggest Jewish communities were another reason<sup>9</sup>: in the 1990s, Israel sought diplomatic relations with them at the embassy level. Diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan were established in February 1992<sup>10</sup>; Israeli embassy in Tashkent was opened in May 1992.<sup>11</sup> Uzbekistan opened its consulate general in Israel, and in 1997 it acquired the status of an embassy. Diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Israel were established in April 1992; in August Israel opened its embassy in the country's capital Astana (today Nur-Sultan); in 1996, Kazakhstan opened its embassy in Tel Aviv.

The relations were developing at a fast pace: in August 1992, Uzbekistan and Israel were connected by direct flights; in July 1994, Foreign Minister of Israel Shimon Peres came to Uzbekistan with an official visit<sup>12</sup> during which the sides signed agreements on investments, cooperation in transport, air traffic and tourism. In April 1997, the foreign minister of Uzbekistan paid a reciprocal visit to Israel, in the course of which the sides signed agreements in the spheres of culture, science and medicine. In 1998, the official visit to Israel of President of Uzbekistan Ilkham Karimov raised bilateral cooperation to a new level. The sides signed agreements on trade, agriculture and health protection. The president of Uzbekistan expressed his solidarity with Israel: he pointed out the dangers of Islamic radicalism that was spreading through Central Asia and was very open about his negative attitude to Iran's nuclear policy.<sup>13</sup>

In September 1992, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Sergey Tereshchenko visited Israel to discuss joint projects in science, communication, pharmacy and air traffic.<sup>14</sup> The sides signed a document on

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<sup>6</sup> I. Muradian, "Israel i Evrazia," INOSMI.RU, available at [<https://inosmi.ru/asia/20100901/162579531.html>], 29 January, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: V.I. Mesamed, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

<sup>8</sup> See: G. Feiler, K. Lim, "Israel and Kazakhstan: Assessing the State of Bilateral Relations," The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 107, May 2014, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> See: "Diaspora: regiony i strany," *Elektronnaia evreiskaia entsiklopedia*.

<sup>10</sup> See: "Strany, s kotorymi Uzbekistan ustanovil diplomaticheskie otnoshenia," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/cooperation/country/>], 26 January, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See: "Posolstvo Israelia v Uzbekistane," available at [<https://embassies.gov.il/tashkent/Pages/default.aspx>], 26 January, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: "Cooperation of the Republic of Uzbekistan with Near East, Middle East and African Countries," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<https://mfa.uz/en/cooperation/countries/376/>], 25 January, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> See: V.I. Mesamed, "Israel i Respublika Uzbekistan: sotrudnichestvo v ekonomicheskoy i sotsialnoy sfere," Institute of the Middle East, 14 January, 2011, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/?p=13810>], 28 January, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See: "Summary of a Meeting between Prime Minister Rabin and Prime Minister Tereshchenko of Kazakhstan," 7 September, 1992, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at [<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook9/Pages/11%20Summary%20of%20a%20meeting%20between%20Prime%20Minister%20Rab.aspx>], 25 January, 2020.

a joint intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation.<sup>15</sup> In 1995, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Israel in the course of which the sides signed the Declaration on the Foundations of Cooperation between the two states as the basis of further bilateral cooperation in investments, health protection and air traffic. In 1998, the two countries signed an agreement on trade and economic cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

During the first post-Soviet decade, Kazakhstan received the Israeli Minister of Science and Economy (1992), Minister of Energy (1993), Director General of the Defense Ministry (1995), and Foreign Minister (1995). Kazakhstan was obviously assigned a special role in Israel's Central Asian strategy.

Israel needed closer ties with oil- and gas-rich Turkmenistan that demonstrated much less enthusiasm<sup>17</sup> mainly because of its close economic relations and cultural and historical closeness with Iran, its southern neighbor. The diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkmenistan were established in December 1993, much later than with its Central Asian neighbors. Turkmenistan took the position of Iran into account, but it required technological, economic and scientific assistance from Israel. Starting in 1994, the top leaders of the two sides exchanged visits.

The 1992-1997 civil war in Tajikistan made the dialog with it much harder than with its neighbors, its cultural and political closeness with Iran presented yet another obstacle.<sup>18</sup> The two countries established diplomatic relations in April 1992, but the Israeli embassy in Uzbekistan was entrusted with sorting out all issues related to Tajikistan. It remained at the margins of Israeli Central Asian policy, yet the official diplomatic relations with another Muslim state were highly important per se.<sup>19</sup>

In March 1992, Israel established official relations with Kyrgyzstan, a country that required assistance in the agriculture, medicine and health care spheres. In 1993, President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev visited Israel, signing several agreements on cooperation in the political and economic spheres, as well as in the areas of culture and science.

In the 1990s, Israel established relationships with all Central Asian states; in 1996 it tried to define a New Periphery, with the post-Soviet Muslim states as its new element.<sup>20</sup>

## Spikes in the Wheel of the Israel-Central Asia Dialog

On the whole, the dialog remained at its initial stage in the last century, and has not demonstrated any progress in the first decade of the 21st century so far due to numerous domestic and foreign policy problems of the Central Asian countries and Israel's passivity. The relations between Israel and Uzbekistan are the most pertinent example. Before 2000, they looked as successful cooperation in security, economy, latest technologies and health protection. In 2004-2005, they plunged into a crisis caused by the suppression of riots in Andijan, at the border with Kyrgyzstan. The presi-

<sup>15</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Kazakhstan s Gosudarstvom Israel," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [<http://mfa.gov.kz/ru/content-view/sotrudnichestvo-respubliki-kazakhstan-s-gosudarstvom-izrail>], 25 January, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See: V.I. Mesamed, "Pravovaia baza i ob'emny sotrudnichestva mezhdru Israelem i Kazakhstanom," Institute of the Middle East, 8 January, 2011, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/?p=13897>], 28 January, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> See: M. Bishku, "The Relations of the Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 6, November 2012, p. 928.

<sup>18</sup> See: G. Feiler, K. Lim, op. cit., p. 19.

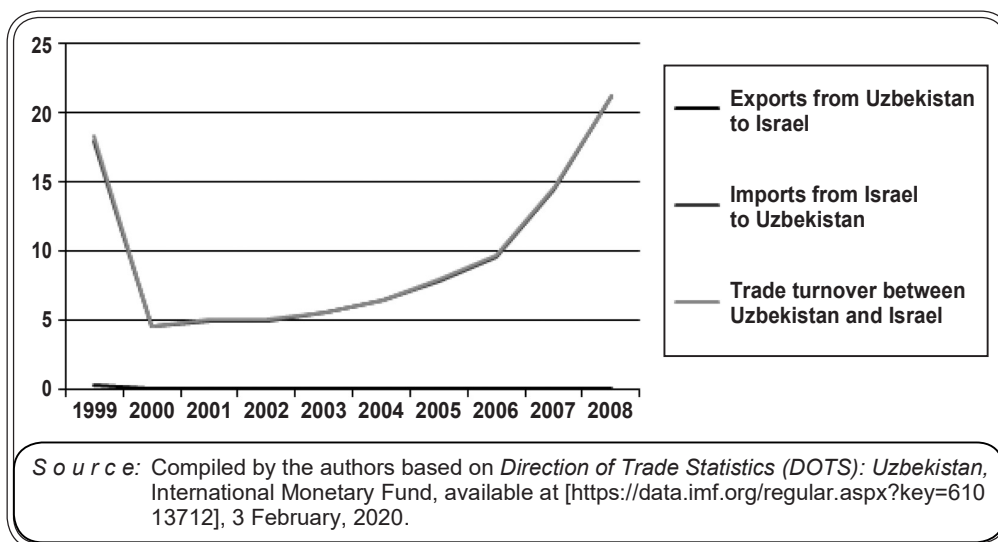
<sup>19</sup> See: V.I. Mesamed, *Israel v Tsentralnoy Azii: grezy i realnost*, p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> See: Iu.I. Kostenko, *Evolutsia periferiynoy strategii Israelia (1990-2017 gg.) (Na primere politiki v Tsentralnoy Azii)*, Ph.D. thesis, Moscow, 2018, p. 106.

dent of Uzbekistan responded to Israel’s support of the U.N. GA resolution that condemned the suppression of anti-government disturbances<sup>21</sup> with slowing down political and economic relations that had no positive effect on the trade turnover in the first place (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1

Trade Turnover between Uzbekistan and Israel (1999-2008) (\$m)



The dialog between Israel and Turkmenistan, which was fairly active in the 1990s, was discontinued in the 2000s, when Iran had moved to the fore in foreign and economic policies of independent Turkmenistan as one of its biggest economic partners.<sup>22</sup> The same can be said about Israel’s relations with Tajikistan. Encouraged by the end of the civil war, Israeli businessmen tried, albeit without much success, to restore their positions on the Tajik market:<sup>23</sup> however, Tajikistan had already turned to Iran. It should be said in all justice that Israel did not need a more active relationship with Tajikistan, since the latter’s relationships with Iran made it rather hopeless.

The relations with Kyrgyzstan, likewise, remained at a low level: the volume of trade turnover remained at the level of \$1 million for nearly two decades.<sup>24</sup> The same applies to Israel’s investment activities in Kyrgyzstan.

In fact, Kazakhstan was the only Central Asian country that was actively developing its cooperation with Israel: It needed Israel’s experience in anti-terrorist fight and the struggle against radical Islam; the countries’ dialog on regional and global issues was steadily developing to become an example of successful cooperation between Jews and Muslims. Mutual interests inspired active investment activities: in 2009, there were 52 Israeli companies working in Kazakhstan; between 1993 and

<sup>21</sup> See: “The Third Committee, taking action on 3 draft resolutions, approves text expressing deep concern over human rights situation in Uzbekistan,” United Nations, 22 November, 2005, available at [<https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/gashe3843.doc.htm>], 4 February, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> See: V.I. Mesamed, *Israel v Tsentralnoy Azii: grezy i realnost*, p. 152.

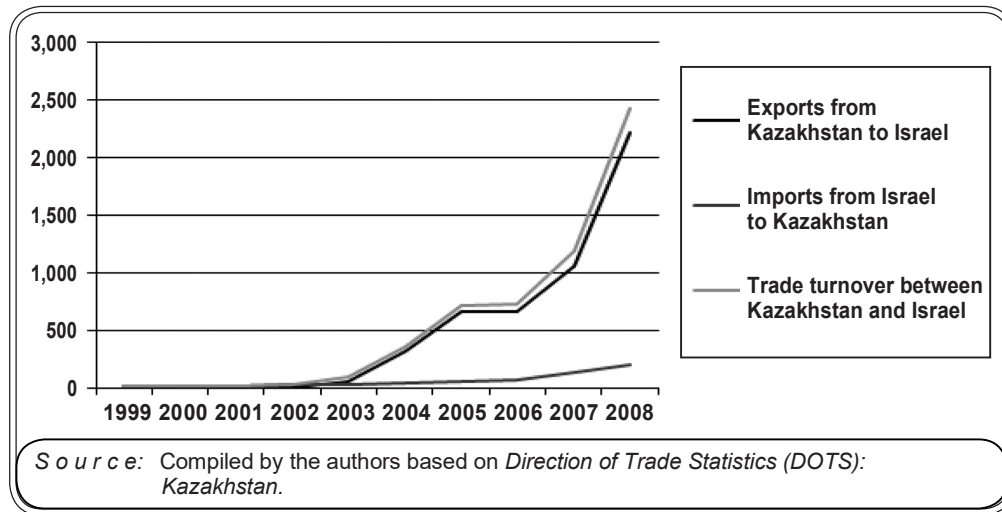
<sup>23</sup> Iu. I. Kostenko, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> See: “Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS): Kyrgyz Republic,” International Monetary Fund, available at [<https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61013712>], 3 February, 2020.

2006 Israel invested about \$300 million<sup>25</sup> in Kazakhstan's economy, particularly in agriculture. In the first decade of the 21st century, the trade turnover between them steadily increased (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2

**Trade Turnover between Kazakhstan and Israel (1999-2008) (\$m)**



In 2008, the trade turnover between the two countries reached \$2.43 billion, an about 100-fold increase since 1999. Kazakhstan supplied Israel with grain, oil and gas and imported electronic components, foodstuffs and chemicals, machines and equipment. Cooperation in health care, medicine, science, education and cultural spheres was also underway.

On the whole, however, Israel's foreign policy in Central Asia in the first decade of the 21st century cannot be characterized as active. Between 2000 and 2008, few of the Israeli top officials visited the region; the dialog, however, was ongoing at different levels.

## Israel's Foreign Policy within the New Peripheral Strategy

In 2010-2011, under the pressure of its mounting confrontation with Iran,<sup>26</sup> the crisis of its relations with Turkey, which were aggravated by the steadily unfolding Islamization, political Islam in the Middle East spreading far and wide against the background of the Arab Spring revolutions and the multiplying terrorist groups, Israel, which had found itself in the center of the circle of animosity, had no choice but to revise its foreign policy, among other things. It needed a new version of the Periph-

<sup>25</sup> See: G. Feiler, K. Lim, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> In 2009, Israeli deputy prime minister Dan Meridor who delivered a keynote address to The Washington Institute of Near East Policy pointed out: "the prospect of Iran obtaining nuclear capabilities remains Israel's most dangerous threat" (D. Meridor, "Israel: The Search for Peace and Security," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, available at [<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/israel-the-search-for-peace-and-security>], 7 February, 2020).

eral Strategy that rechanneled Tel Aviv's attention to the Central Asian, South Caucasian and the moderate Arab states of the Middle East, North Africa and the non-Muslim states of the Mediterranean.

In fact, it was back in the middle of 2008 that Israel had decided to pour more efforts into the Central Asian vector of its foreign policy. At the end of the same year, its foreign ministry set up a Eurasia-2 department to work with the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries.<sup>27</sup> Israel replaced its ambassadors to all Central Asian countries; the foreign minister of Israel acquired an advisor for the CIS countries, while since 2008 Israel's high officials increased the number of their visits to the region. Head of Eurasia-2 Shemi Tzur visited Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan; the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Amnon Cohen visited Kazakhstan, while the Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel Majali Wahaben visited Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The ambassador of Israel to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan visited Tajikistan. The visits of top Israeli officials testified to the fact that the region had acquired a new political and economic role in Israel's foreign policy. In implementing the New Peripheral Strategy in general and the Central Asian vector, in particular, Israel proceeded not only from political considerations, but also from economic benefits.

Foreign Minister of Israel Avigdor Lieberman, appointed in 2009, outlined the new foreign policy priorities—a political dialog and trade and economic cooperation with the moderate Central Asian Muslim republics. In his message of 7 October, 2009, he pointed out that Israel would be able to cope with all problems if and when it had widened the coalition and poured more efforts into its relations with the countries and continents “abandoned” by Israel.<sup>28</sup>

Kazakhstan, which favored the region's stability, supported a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was determined to fight radical Islam, was a natural choice as a priority partner within the New Peripheral Strategy. Involved in the activities of regional and international Islamic organizations, it looked as a bridge of sorts to the Muslim world, while its status of a secular state was confirmed by its Constitution.<sup>29</sup> Its population, less Islamic than in many other countries, was positively disposed to Jews.

Likewise, economic cooperation, based on the newly signed agreements on encouragement and mutual protection of investments, trade and economic cooperation, collaboration and mutual assistance in customs affairs, interaction in the sphere of business activities, investments and widening of mutually advantageous cooperation were of key importance in the bilateral economic relations. They were further promoted by the Kazakhstan-Israeli Intergovernmental Commission on trade and economic cooperation and the Israeli-Kazakhstan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In the last decade Kazakhstan remained Israel's main trade and economic partner in the region (see Fig. 3).

In the last decade, the trade turnover between the two countries dropped twice (see Fig. 4).

In 2009, amid the world economic crisis and the low and dropping oil prices (the oil accounted for 80 to 90 percent of Kazakhstan's exports to Israel), trade turnover between Israel and Kazakhstan dropped by 50 percent and even lower in 2015 (\$305 million, the level of 2004). In 2018, the volume of bilateral trade increased by 38.7 percent against 2017; the oil imported from Kazakhstan accounted, on average, for 15 to 25 percent of Israel's total oil imports,<sup>30</sup> which made Kazakhstan a country of strategic importance for Israel.

<sup>27</sup> See: A. Grigorian, “Prioritetnye napravleniia vneshney politiki Izraelia: Iuzhny Kavkaz i Tsentralnaia Azia,” Nora-vank Foundation, 10 September, 2009, available at [[http://www.noravank.am/rus/issues/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=2713](http://www.noravank.am/rus/issues/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2713)], 11 February, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> See: “‘Novaia vneshniaia politika’ Liebermana. Dokument MID Izraelia,” Newsru.co.il, 7 October, 2009, available at [[http://newsru.co.il/israel/07oct2009/mid\\_105.html](http://newsru.co.il/israel/07oct2009/mid_105.html)], 11 February, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> See: *Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, Official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [[https://www.akorda.kz/ru/official\\_documents/constitution](https://www.akorda.kz/ru/official_documents/constitution)], 12 February, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> See: “Slabosti—v preimushchestva,” *Forbes Kazakhstan*, No. 62, October 2016, available at [[https://forbes.kz/process/technologies/slabosti\\_v\\_preimushchestva/](https://forbes.kz/process/technologies/slabosti_v_preimushchestva/)], 12 January, 2020.

Figure 3

Trade Turnover between Israel and the Central Asian Countries (\$m)

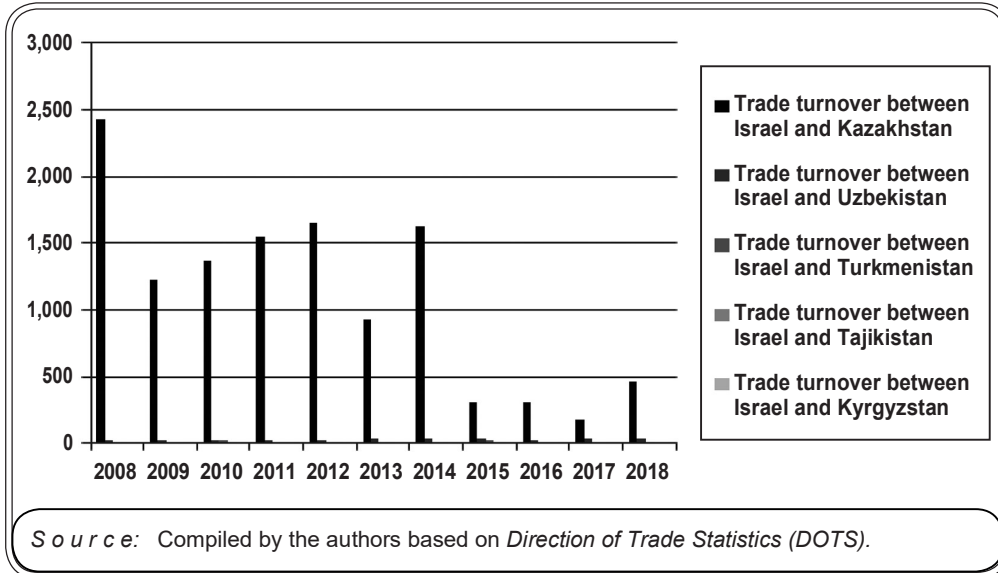
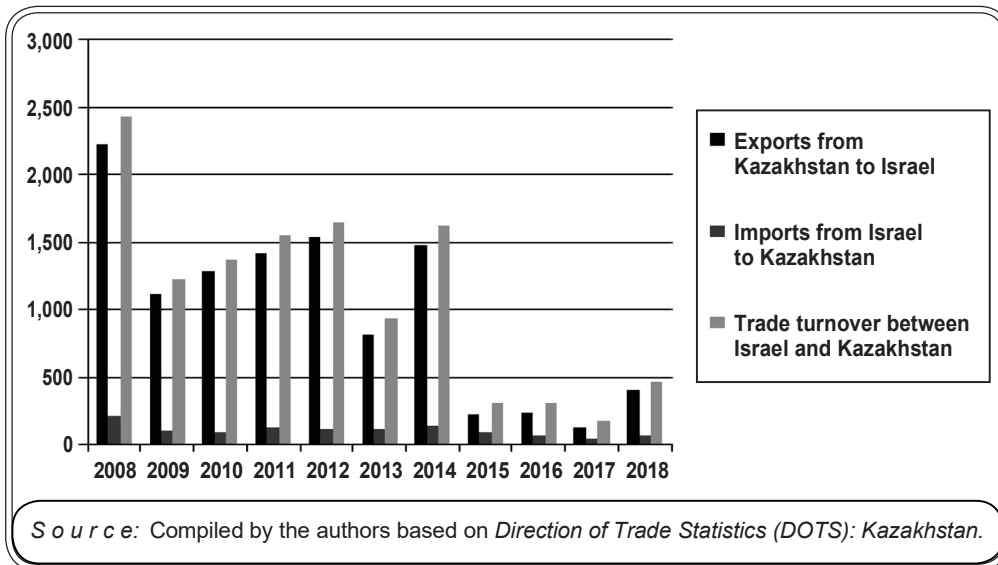


Figure 4

Trade Turnover Between Israel and Kazakhstan (2008-2018) (\$m)



Oil is not the only item imported from Kazakhstan: Israel also buys other mineral resources, metals and grain. For its part, Kazakhstan buys from Israel electronic components, mechanical equipment, chemicals, etc.



Israel is building up its investment activities in Kazakhstan, which needs Israeli money and, in addition, maintains a favorable investment climate within its borders. By 2017, over 270 enterprises with Israeli capital were functioning in Kazakhstan; Israel participates in investment projects in construction, oil and gas and processing industry, cable production, medicine, and urban infrastructure. Agriculture was and remains the priority: drip irrigation, hothouses and water- and energy-saving technologies are among the things shared by Israel. The sides realized several agricultural high-tech projects. Kazakhstan desperately needs Israeli water-saving technologies, drip irrigation, in particular, in the zones of hazardous agriculture,<sup>31</sup> production of foodstuffs and dairy husbandry.<sup>32</sup>

MASHAV (Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) puts a lot of effort into developing bilateral relations. It runs five consultative centers for the development of small and medium businesses in agriculture, medicine and higher education.<sup>33</sup>

Israel plans to expand its presence in the Kazakhstan economy to be able to join infrastructural projects implemented in Eurasia, including China's New Silk Road project; it also hopes that Kazakhstan will help it set up a free trade area with the EAEU. In 2016, during his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Nazarbayev said that he fully supported Israel's interest in the EAEU.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the fairly high level of economic cooperation between the two countries that was attained in the last decade, there are enough negative factors: certain Israeli companies had to revise their policies in Kazakhstan because of the economic and currency crisis and a high level of corruption.<sup>35</sup> The absence of direct flights between the two countries (despite the joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Sphere of Air Traffic signed in 2016<sup>36</sup>) does not benefit their bilateral relations. In February 2020, Kazakhstan and Israel decided to launch direct flights in May 2020.<sup>37</sup>

In the last decade, the two countries have been paying more attention in their cooperation in the security sphere, exchange of military technologies and intelligence and anti-terrorist struggle. Back in 2010, the SIBAT at the Israeli Defense Ministry approved Kazakhstan as a potential trade partner. Israeli companies—ELBIT, Plasan, FAB, Israel Aerospace Industries, Israel Military Industries and others—have been periodically participating in exhibitions of foreign armaments held by the Kazakhstan Defense Expo (KADEX) since 2010.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation signed in 2014<sup>38</sup> added more vigor to the bilateral efforts in the security sphere. At a 2016 meeting, the defense ministers reached "agreements on cooperation in production of drones using Israeli technologies and training Kazakhstan military at the Training Center for UAV Operators."<sup>39</sup> In 2019, they signed a long-term

<sup>31</sup> See: N.S. Orlovsky, I.S. Zonn, "Vodnye resursy Izraelia: opyt osvoeniia," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2018, pp. 8-36, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2018-5-1-8-36>].

<sup>32</sup> See: "Ekonomiki Izraelia i Kazakhstana," Israel's Embassy in Kazakhstan, available at [<https://embassies.gov.il/as-tana/Relations/Pages/economic-relations.aspx>], 14 February, 2020

<sup>33</sup> See: Iu.I. Kostenko, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>34</sup> See: "Kazakhstan podderzhivaet interes Izraelia k zone svobodnoy trgovli c EAES," RIA Novosti, 14 December, 2016, available at [<https://ria.ru/20161214/1483562665.html>], 14 February, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> See: S. Ramani, "The Israel-Kazakhstan Partnership," *The Diplomat*, 19 July, 2016, available at [<https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/the-israel-kazakhstan-partnership/>], 14 February, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> See: "Mezhdu Kazahstanom i Izraelem otkroiut priamoe aviasoobshchenie," STMEGI Новости, 14 December, 2016, available at [<https://stmegi.com/posts/40568/mezhdu-kazahstanom-i-izraelem-otkroyut-priamoe-aviasoobshchenie/>], 15 February, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> See: "Mezhdu Kazahstanom i Izraelem otkroetsia priamoe aviasoobshchenie," LeChaim, 20 February, 2020, available at [<https://lechaim.ru/news/mezhdu-kazahstanom-i-izraelem-otkroetsia-priamoe-aviasoobshchenie/>], 20 February, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> See: "Kazakhstan i Israel podpisali dogovor o voenno-tekhnikeskom sotrudnichestve," *Voenny obozrevatel*, 21 January, 2014, available at [<https://warsonline.info/inostrannie-armii/kazahstan-i-izrail-podpisali-dogovor-o-voenno-tehnicheskmo-sotrudnichestve.html>], 15 February, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> "Novye puti sotrudnichestva otsenili ministry oborony Kazakhstana i Izraelia," KAZINFORM, 22 August, 2016, available at [[https://www.inform.kz/ru/novye-puti-sotrudnichestva-ocenili-ministry-oborony-kazahstana-i-izrailya\\_a2940167](https://www.inform.kz/ru/novye-puti-sotrudnichestva-ocenili-ministry-oborony-kazahstana-i-izrailya_a2940167)], 16 February, 2020.

contact on the final drone assembly in Kazakhstan.<sup>40</sup> This made Kazakhstan one of Israel’s closest partner in the Muslim world in the security sphere. Kazakhstan needs cooperation with Israel not only because of its impressive achievements in military technologies and training, but also because its closer relations with Israel will consolidate its ties with the EU and the United States in the security sphere.

Their cooperation in medicine and health care is just as successful: the two countries open joint medical centers in Kazakhstan, improve the quality of medical services, develop a high-tech system of health protection. Their cooperation in tourism, scientific, cultural and humanitarian spheres is also important.

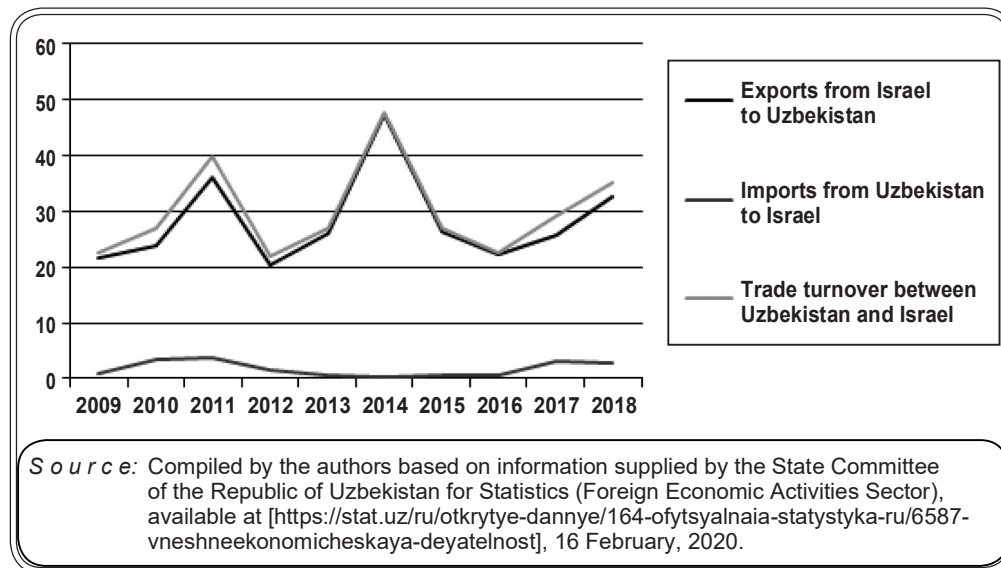
As a Muslim state that supports a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Uzbekistan is one of Israel’s Central Asian priorities within the New Peripheral Strategy. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan provide examples of cooperation between Jews and Muslims. Uzbekistan, which borders Afghanistan, needs Israel’s experience in the struggle against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, as well as its achievements in the sphere of industrial and agricultural technologies.

As part of the New Peripheral Strategy, Israel revived its economic relations with Uzbekistan. According to the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Statistics, in 2018 the volume of bilateral trade grew by 36 percent against 2016. The share of Israel in Uzbekistan trade turnover is 90 percent on average: Tashkent imports electrical machines, equipment, pharmaceutical products and plants. Israel imports from Uzbekistan plastics, fruit, nuts, sets of optical and medical instruments, etc.<sup>41</sup>

In the recent decade, the volume of trade between the two countries had ranged between \$27 and \$47 million (see Fig. 5). In the last three years, they have been pouring more efforts into the roadmap of their trade and economic relations.

Figure 5

Trade Turnover between Israel and Uzbekistan (2009-2018) (\$m)



<sup>40</sup> See: “Kazakhstan i Izrael budut sovместno proizvodit BPLA,” GolosIslama.RU, 6 August, 2019, available at [<https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=36972>], 16 February, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> See: “Vneshneekonomicheskaya deyatelnost,” State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Statistics, available at [<https://stat.uz/ru/otkrytye-dannye/164-ofytsyalnaia-statystyka-ru/6587-vneshneekonomicheskaya-deyatelnost>], 16 February, 2020.

In 2017, the Ministry for Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan initiated talks on holding the first meeting of the Uzbek-Israeli Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, set up in 2000 to promote bilateral trade and investments. In 2019, the sides reached an agreement on establishing the Israel-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>42</sup> On the whole, these decisions were not so much about effective trade as about new investment projects. Today, there are 38 enterprises with Israeli capital functioning in Uzbekistan, eight of them with 100 percent Israeli capital.<sup>43</sup> Israel prefers to pour its money into agriculture, while Uzbekistan, a country with severe environmental conditions, desperately needs Israel's experience in managing water resources.<sup>44</sup> Uzbekistan introduced the Israeli drip irrigation technologies to ease the burden on its water resources.

In 2018, the Navoiy Region mastered and started using the drip irrigation technology imported from Israel.<sup>45</sup> The Israeli company NETAJIM, which has been working in Uzbekistan for 25 years now, has widened the geography of application of its drip irrigation technology for cotton fields.<sup>46</sup> In 2019, it established drip irrigation on 82 hectares of cotton fields in the Kurgan-Tepe District. All in all, in 2019 this technology was applied on 33,200 hectares, or 44 percent of the total drip irrigation area.<sup>47</sup>

In 2019, Uzbekistan adopted a Decision on measures of expanding the mechanisms of stimulating the introduction of water-saving resources in agriculture. In May 2019, Uzbekistan hosted an Uzbek-Israeli agro-business forum; in July Israel stated that it was ready to promote exchange of experience and training and retraining of Uzbek specialists. In late 2019, the Minister of Innovations of Uzbekistan signed an agreement on acquiring several thousand generators to produce water out of air, developed by an Israeli company Watergen.<sup>48</sup> Israel has been recently intensifying its cooperation in animal husbandry and dairy factories by supplying Uzbekistan with equipment. In 2020, President of Uzbekistan passed a decision on state support of husbandry and on setting up the Republican Council for the development of animal husbandry and all its branches.<sup>49</sup>

In its relations with Uzbekistan, Israel pays particular attention to health care and education; the lion's share of projects is realized by MASHAV. Uzbekistan built a medical center staffed with Israeli doctors with Israeli support.<sup>50</sup> Israeli ophthalmologists regularly visit Uzbekistan for free surgeries and training courses.<sup>51</sup> In April 2019, the sides started negotiations on building an oncological diagnostic

<sup>42</sup> See: "Namecheny prakticheskie shagi po usileniu delovogo sotrudnichestva mezhdru Uzbekistanom i Izraelem," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/press/news/2019/07/20051/>], 16 February, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> See: "V Minvneshtorge Uzbekistana proshla vstrecha s poslom Izraelia," UzDaily, 11 May, 2018, available at [<https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/post/37418>], 16 February, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> See: N.S. Orlovsky, L.G. Orlovskaya, I.S. Zonn, "Okhrana prirody v Izraile," *Problemy postsovetovskogo prostranstva*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2019, pp. 336-354, available at [<https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2019-6-4-336-354>].

<sup>45</sup> See: "V Navoijskoy oblasti v pervye stali primeniat kapelnoe oroshenie khlopatnika," KUN.UZ, 27 July, 2018, available at [<https://kun.uz/ru/52572564>], 16 February, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> See: "Izraelskiy opyt irrigatsii—Uzbekistanu," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 October, 2019, available at [<https://mfa.gov.il/MFARUS/ForeignRelations/Bilateral%20relations/EuroAsia/Uzbekistan/Pages/Israeli-knowledge-of-water-tech-helps-Uzbekistan.aspx>], 16 February, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> See: "O merakh po rasshireniu mekhanizmov stimulirovaniya vnedreniya vodoberegaiushchikh tekhnologiy v sel'skom khoziaystve," Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 25 October, 2019, available at [<https://uza.uz/ru/documents/o-merakh-po-rasshireniyu-mekhanizmov-stimulirovaniya-vnedren-25-10-2019>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> See: "Uzbekistan zakupit tysiachi izraelskikh ustanovok po dobyche vody iz vozdukha," Newsru.co.il, available at [<http://www.newsru.co.il/finance/02nov2019/watergen303.html>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> See: "Zhivotnovodam v Uzbekistane predostavyat subsidii i kompensatsii," Sputnik, 30 January, 30, available at [<https://uz.sputniknews.ru/economy/20200130/13337396/Zhivotnovodam-v-Uzbekistane-predostavyat-subsidii-i-kompensatsii.html>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> See: K. Faulkner, "Enjoying Good Relations with a Muslim State: Uzbekistan and Israel," Kehilanews, 31 October, 2016, available at [<https://news.kehila.org/enjoying-good-relations-with-a-muslim-state-uzbekistan-and-israel/>], 18 February, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> See: "Oftalmologi iz Izraelia besplatno provedud operatsii v Uzbekistane," Gazeta.uz, 7 May, 2019, available at [<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/05/07/zion/>], 18 February, 2020.

center and an oncological clinic in Uzbekistan.<sup>52</sup> The talks on getting access to Israel's experience in standardization and digitalization of medicine and raising the level of medical services are under way.<sup>53</sup>

Israel is pouring more efforts into cooperation with Uzbekistan, which is greatly interested in its educational system. The sides have already organized teacher and student exchange; training specialists in the most needed fields, introduction of information technologies and the latest teaching methods in the educational process.<sup>54</sup>

In recent years, bilateral relations have been developing in the tourist sphere; since 10 February, 2018, Israeli citizens no longer need a visa to stay in Uzbekistan for 30 days. In 2018, the number of Israeli tourists doubled,<sup>55</sup> stirring up even greater interest among the Israeli tourist agencies. In July 2019, the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Israel and Director of the Israel Association of Travel Agencies & Consultants (ITTAA) agreed to promote the tourist potential of Uzbekistan in Israel on the ITTAA platform<sup>56</sup> and signed an agreement with the Association of Private Tourist Organizations of Uzbekistan on partnership and cooperation in the tourist sphere.<sup>57</sup>

On the whole, in the last few years, the two countries left behind several decades of stagnating relations and even discovered new spheres of bilateral cooperation.

The Iranian factor figures prominently in the Israeli-Turkmen relationships: Ashgabad has found itself in a trap: cooperation with the Jewish state against the background of its complicated relations with Iran. In early 2007, when President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov came to power, he was ready to widen its country's cooperation with Israel. In 2009, the Foreign Minister of Israel and the President of Turkmenistan agreed to open an Embassy of Israel in Ashgabad. In January 2012, the two sides discussed possible spheres of their cooperation (electric power, agriculture and health care); in 2013, Israel opened its embassy in Ashgabad and appointed Shemi Tzur its ambassador.

Political consultations between the foreign ministries of both countries became an important part of their dialog. In 2016, Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan visited Israel. This visit, the first in twenty years, confirmed that Turkmenistan needed and was ready to strengthen bilateral economic and cultural ties.<sup>58</sup>

The dialog on political issues is the foundation of the two countries' bilateral cooperation within international organizations, first and foremost, the U.N.<sup>59</sup>

Trade and economy are the two priorities of Turkmenistan-Israeli cooperation, even if the volume of trade turnover is still very low. According to the data for 2018, it amounted to \$1.17 million.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See: "Vstrecha v Izraele," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 16 April, 2019, available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/press/news/2019/04/18610/>], 18 February, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> See: "V Izraele obsuzhdeny voprosy razvitiya sotrudnichestva v oblasti zdravookhraneniia," UzDaily.uz, 6 August, 2019, available at [<https://uzdaily.uz/ru/post/45373>], 18 February, 2020

<sup>54</sup> See: "Rektory obsudili perspektivy sotrudnichestva," UzDaily, 17 April, 2019, available at [<http://www.uzdaily.com/ru/post/43213>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Uzbekistan so stranami Srednego, Blizhnego Vostoka i Afriki," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<https://mfa.uz/ru/cooperation/countries/59/>], 7 February, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> See: "V Izraele obsuzhdeny voprosy razvitiya sotrudnichestva v oblasti turizma," UzDaily, 31 July, 2019, available at [<http://www.uzdaily.com/ru/post/45268>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> See: "Sostoialos podpisanie memorandum mezhdu Assotsiatsiyey chasnykh turisticheskikh organizatsiy Uzbekistana i Izraelskoy assotsiatsiyey turisticheskikh agentstv i konsultantov," UzDaily, 14 November, 2019, available at [<https://uzdaily.uz/ru/post/47521>], 17 February, 2020

<sup>58</sup> See: "Glava MID Turkmenistana posetil Izrael vpervye za 20 let," Radio Ozodi, 1 June, 2016, available at [<https://rus.ozodi.org/a/27771971.html>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> See: "Politicheskie konsultatsii mezhdu Turkmenistanom i Gosudarsvom Izrael," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, available at [<https://www.mfa.gov.tm/ru/news/14>], 17 February, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> See: "Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS): Turkmenistan," International Monetary Fund [<https://data.imf.org/regu-lar.aspx?key=61013712>], 4 February, 2020.

The share of Turkmenistan in trade turnover is zero, since the trade balance is one-sided—at this point only 1% of Turkmenistan’s imported goods come from Israel.

The two countries, however, are developing their cooperation in the oil and gas sphere: Israel took part in the reconstruction of Turkmenistan’s largest oil refinery.

Israel and Turkmenistan are developing cooperation in the spheres of agriculture and water management. Israeli companies that work in Uzbekistan are introducing high technologies in Turkmenistan’s agrarian sphere. In 2019, the sides discussed a possibility of supplying Turkmenistan with drip irrigation equipment;<sup>61</sup> the countries are contemplating wider cooperation in health care.

On the whole, we can say that despite their mutual desire, the bilateral relations remain at a low level due to closer relations between Turkmenistan and Iran and the extremely complicated relations between Tehran and Tel Aviv.

The Iranian factor is present in the Israel and Tajikistan relations, which are not, in fact, one of Israel’s foreign policy priorities. Their dialog is stalling; Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country that the Israeli prime minister did not visit. Recently the sides have activated their bilateral contacts at the level of ministries, at which plans of cooperation in economy and health care were discussed. Cooperation in agriculture increased in 2009.<sup>62</sup> In 2017, President of Tajikistan said that he expected even more efficient cooperation between the two countries, primarily in agriculture.<sup>63</sup> The volume of mutual trade is negligible. According to the 2018 data, trade turnover between them amounted to \$3.56 million; the share of Tajikistan’s exports was \$5,000.

Kyrgyzstan occupies the last line on the list of Israel’s Central Asian partners mainly because of the fairly weak legal basis of bilateral cooperation; the volume of trade turnover is small to the extent that these figures are not included in Israeli statistical publications. According to Kyrgyz sources, the volume of trade turnover was \$1.7 million,<sup>64</sup> in which the share of Kyrgyz exports was even smaller than negligible.

Agriculture is an exception: the close contacts realized through MASHAV included consultative and educational services related to the use of water resources. Israel introduced drip irrigation technologies, it shared with Kyrgyzstan its skills of fighting desertification, construction of hothouses, dairy mini-plants, etc.

## *Conclusion*

In the post-Soviet period, Israel has invigorated its Central Asian policy and identified Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as priorities. Israel’s Central Asian policy has developed in stages.

- At the first stage, the mutual interest led the sides to a dialog; it intensified contacts between the Jewish state and the Central Asian Muslim countries.
- At the second stage, Israel was operating by inertia without political or economic gains.

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<sup>61</sup> See: “Turkmenia zainteresovalas postavkami orositelnykh system iz Izraelia,” REGNUM, 6 September, 2019, available at [<https://regnum.ru/news/2711054.html>], 4 February, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> See: “Tadzhikistan i Izrael vystupili za rasshirenie sotrudnichestva v sfere selskogo khoziaistva,” AVESTA, 14 December, 2011, available at [<http://avesta.tj/2011/12/14/tadzhikistan-i-izrael-vystupili-za-rasshirenie-sotrudnichestva-v-sfere-selskogo-hozyajstva/>], 19 February, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> See: “Posol Izraelia v Tadzhikistane vruchil veritelnye gramoty prezidentu Rakhmonu,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at [<https://mfa.gov.il/MFARUS/PressRoom/2017/Pages/Israeli-Ambassador-to-Tajikistan-presented-his-credentials.aspx>], 19 February, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> See: “Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS): Kyrgyz Republic,” International Monetary Fund, available at [<https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61013712>], 4 February, 2020.

- The third stage began in 2010, when Central Asia found itself in the focus of Israel's close attention. The New Peripheral Strategy became part of Tel Aviv's foreign policy agenda: Israel was seeking firmer positions in the Muslim world for the sake of its own security. This is achieved by creating a circle of friendly states to suppress new threats. Tel Aviv focuses on cooperation in the economy and high-tech spheres. Its relations with Central Asian countries give Tel Aviv a chance to demonstrate a successful model of cooperation between the Jewish state and Muslim countries.

The future of Israel's Central Asian policy depends on continued pro-American orientation of the regional states: today relations with Israel are seen as a platform of closer cooperation with the West.