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The Role of Science Diplomacy in Developing Political and Economic Relations of Israel with the Central Asian and Caucasian Countries

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Extended Abstract

With the exponential growth of advances in the fields of science and technology, governments' efforts to exploit these achievements in order to advance their foreign policy goals have increased. Taking advantage of foreign relations to enhance science and technology capabilities has become one of the most important goals of the diplomatic apparatus of countries. This approach, as a priority aspect of diplomacy, has gained an increasingly important role as a soft power asset. Israel, as soon as neutralizing basic security threats, began to brand itself as a startup nation. A significant number of stakeholders in the Israeli science and technology ecosystem have positioned themselves as technological leaders with extensive investment, creating a suitable capacity for international cooperation. The Zion-

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ist movement viewed science as the foundation of the restoration of Jewish power in the Promised Land. In the 1920s, prior to the establishment of Israel, a technical and research center was set up in Haifa, along with several medical and agricultural stations across Palestine. These efforts led to the development of a science culture that played a significant role in the life of the newly formed Jewish community in Palestine. Following the creation of Israel, science quickly became central to its ideology, economy, security, and culture. Despite limited natural and human resources and territorial depth, Israel focused on building its technical and scientific infrastructure, investing in education, research, and technology to achieve technological superiority, which became a cornerstone of its military, policies, and discourse. By the mid-1960s, the number of Israeli universities had grown from two to six, and a network of research institutes, industrial and academic laboratories had been established. Israeli universities excelled in doctoral production in the 1970s and made significant advancements in agricultural and water sciences and engineering. Israel has continued to strive for leadership in various scientific and technical fields, such as genetics, medicine, mathematics, advanced technologies, biotechnology, agriculture, and military science. According to the UNESCO Science Report published in 2021, Israel allocated 5.8% of its budget to agriculture, 2.8% to research and development, 2.5% to telecommunications and other infrastructure, and 1.4% to political and social systems. In 2018, Israel dedicated 4.94% of its GDP to research. Countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Russian expert workforces, inherited Soviet legacies in some technological fields but faced a void in rapidly changing fields of science and technology. The authors of this study assert that science diplomacy is the cornerstone of Israel's activities in this part of the post-Soviet region, enabling Israel to bolster and deepen its ties with the region by identifying their technical and scientific needs in various fields such as security, agriculture, energy, military, cyber, and medicine. This qualitative research was conducted with a descriptive-analytical approach based on library and internet resources. Facing extensive challenges after the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the withdrawal of Russian expert forces, the

countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus turned to actors with sufficient knowledge and experience in these fields to increase national wealth and address various issues such as the economy, optimal exploitation of natural resources, and security threats. Israeli politicians, by identifying the technical and specialized needs of these countries, successfully established relations with their governments and strengthened their presence in those countries. Central Asia and the Caucasus serve as examples of successful conduct of Israel's science diplomacy to expand its political and economic relations. This policy has also been successful in Africa and the Persian Gulf countries, paving the way for Israel in a short time. This policy is considered one of the foundations of the Abraham Peace Treaty and the expansion of Arab-Israeli relations. The study first presents the conceptual framework of science diplomacy, then explains the position of science and technology in Israel, and examines the missing link of science, technology, and innovation in Central Asia and the Caucasus to consolidate national power in these countries. Finally, the study addresses the role of science diplomacy in the development of Israel's political and economic relations in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Science, technology, and innovation have become essential tools for diplomacy in today's world, offering new opportunities for interaction and convergence among governments. The increasing challenges such as environmental pollution, global warming, and cyber attacks have emphasized the need to invest in science, technology, and innovation and connect with leaders in these fields. This is crucial for Israel, which has faced challenges of isolation and illegitimacy since its establishment but has advantages in science and technology, enabling it to gain legitimacy and increase political influence. Science diplomacy has become a strategic tool for advancing Israel's foreign policy, particularly in peripheral regions. Israel's investment in the technology sector has helped overcome limitations and create breathing space in the regional and international arena. The foundation of the Abrahamic Peace Pacts was built on Israeli technology, fostering cooperation with Arab governments in scientific, technological, and innovation development programs. Israeli weapons and technologies played a significant role in

Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 Karabakh War. Technology is a comparative advantage for Israel, with a significant portion of its exports related to advanced technologies. Israel's expertise in water management has attracted countries like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, which are seeking solutions to cope with their water crisis. Israel's innovations in agriculture and food security have also garnered interest in these regions. Israel's actions within the Masav program focus on agricultural projects, contributing to food security in these countries and enhancing Israel's image. The presence of students from these regions in Israel fosters cultural exchange and support for the regime. These activities showcase Israel's technological and innovative power, encourage government communication, and improve Israel's image, especially in the face of global public opinion conflicts.

Key words: Science Diplomacy, Startup Nation, Soft Power, Israel, Central Asia, Caucasus.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.