



## Can China's new ambassador to Israel reset the strained relationship?

By Tuvia Gering and Ofir Dayan / Dec. 12, 2024

On November 29, Beijing appointed Xiao Junzheng as its new ambassador to Israel, signaling an effort to repair relations strained by its contentious [response](#) to the October 7, 2023, attacks. After three decades of fostering ties with Israel, China remains eager to access Israeli innovation and markets while projecting itself as an objective “friend to all” and a “responsible major power.” Xiao now faces the critical challenge of restoring trust and ensuring that Beijing’s actions align with its professed commitment to neutrality and balanced diplomacy.

Cai Run, China’s outgoing ambassador to Israel, was summoned from Portugal after his predecessor’s untimely [death](#) in May 2020. Tragedy continued to define his tenure, as he grappled with two wars, a global pandemic, and the pressures of great power competition. He proved highly effective on the economic front. Under his stewardship, bilateral trade peaked at \$21 billion in 2022, and Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) dominated the market, with [71 percent](#) of EVs sold in Israel coming from Chinese brands this year. He ensured the continuation of direct flights and secured the presence of [twenty thousand](#) Chinese workers in Israel during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the October 7, 2023, attacks.

However, Cai, a party member first and a diplomat second, toed the party line when [navigating](#) the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was evident in his silence during the 2021 Gaza war and his two tone-deaf [addresses](#) to the Israeli public since October 7, 2023. During Cai’s tenure, Israeli attitudes toward China fell to the lowest point in a decade, even before the eruption of the war. Following October 7, 2023, 30 percent of Israelis reported more negative opinions toward Beijing, with [more than half](#) viewing China as “unfriendly” or “hostile” to Israel.

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