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AFRICAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS: IMPACT ON CONTINENTAL UNITY

Jake C. Miller

THE October War of 1973, like other wars, had major impacts upon the international system. In addition to producing new strains in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, it brought Arab and Israeli leaders together for the first time in mediation efforts. It also dramatized the effectiveness of Arab oil as a vital weapon of diplomacy. For the Organization of African Unity (OAU) the war, likewise, had a special significance—it further advanced the cause of continental unity. According to the Charter of the OAU, member nations were to harmonize their policies in crucial fields so as to promote the unity and solidarity of the African states.¹ From the outset, however, the Arab-Israeli conflict had tended to undermine true continental unity. Black African nations had attempted to isolate themselves from the conflict since many of them had sought to maintain amiable ties with both Israel and the Arab states. The wars of 1956 and 1967 had failed to sway the majority of the African nations from their loyalty to Israel, in spite of the emotional appeals of the Arabs. By 1973 Arab leaders of North Africa had begun to show disenchantment with African countries which retained Israeli ties. The OAU's tenth anniversary was threatened with disaster because of strong Arab insistence upon greater African support for their cause. The Organization survived this crucial test; there was, however, much bitterness left because of the explosive issue. The failure to convince Black Africa to stand unequivocally with her sister nations was viewed by many observers as a major defeat for Arab diplomacy.

When war erupted in the fall of 1973 it was able to achieve what years of intense Arab diplomatic efforts had failed to accomplish—a “continental response” to Israeli occupation of Arab territories. Prior to the outbreak of the conflict, African support for Israel had begun a slow erosion, but by the conclusion of the war, virtually all African states had deserted the Israeli cause. “African solidarity” appeared to have received an important boost from the conflict.

This paper will analyze African-Israeli relations to determine their impact upon continental unity. Both historical and current relationships will be taken into consideration.

1. *OAU Charter*, 1963, Article II, Section 1 (C & D).

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Pre-1963 Relationships

Black African nations, led by Ghana, began to arrive on the international scene in 1956. The desire on the part of Ghana to develop herself economically appeared to have coincided with the Israeli attempt to establish a foothold on a continent which was destined to contribute numerous new nations to the international community within the next decade. New national attitudes were envisioned as being crucial inputs into a United Nations machinery which was currently "overworked" with problems of the Middle East. While Israel was interested in suggesting herself as a model for other nations seeking rapid development, and at the same time displaying humanitarian concern, she could not have been oblivious to the important diplomatic mileage which could be obtained from African foreign aid programs.*

Israel's first major undertaking in Ghana was the joint development of the Black Star Shipping Line. Since this initial effort, the two countries have collaborated in several other major endeavors. The Ghanaian venture, however, was only one of many Israeli programs in Africa, including such projects as:

1. The modernization of posts and telecommunications in Ethiopia.
2. The training of the National Youth Services in Kenya and Uganda.
3. The fight against tropical diseases in Liberia.
4. Pilot farms and agriculture schools in the Ivory Coast.
5. The training of military officers in Uganda and the Congo (Zaire).²

Not only did Israel employ the economic instrument, but diplomatic and cultural ones as well. Between 1957 and 1961, Israel established diplomatic relations with 16 independent African nations, and by 1972, this number had grown to 29. The Israeli efforts were aided by personal visits of top governmental officials, including Foreign Minister Golda Meir (later the Prime Minister) and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. The Israeli offensive proved to be effective, in spite of the Arab counter efforts which were designed to discourage relations between Israel and African countries.

Like Israel, Arab countries sought to maximize their influence upon independent countries of Black Africa, and in this effort, they utilized both bilateral and multi-lateral approaches. In addition to direct negotiations with the individual countries of Africa, Arab leaders were active in the pursuit of their objectives at international conferences, and through international organizations. One of the major Arab diplomatic efforts took place at the First Conference of Independent African States at

* Scholars disagree as to the "fruitfulness" of Israeli foreign aid in the winning of needed African friends in the United Nations. Samuel Decalo, after having analyzed the 1967 votes of the General Assembly on Middle East issues, concluded that Israeli diplomacy, apparently, paid dividends. (See "Africa and the Mid-Eastern War," *African Report*, Oct. 1967, p. 61.) Philippe Decraene differed when he reviewed the impact of the June War six years later. He concluded that "seven years of efforts had proved largely fruitless." (See "Africa and the Mideast Crisis," *Africa Report*, May-June 1973, p. 22, 23.)

2. Philippe Decraene, "Africa and the Mideast Crisis," *Africa Report*, May-June 1973, p. 22.

Accra, Ghana (1958). At this meeting, countries from Black Africa were influential in preventing the Arab majority from including Israel on the list of "racist" and "imperialist" powers condemned by the Conference. The delegates had to content themselves with the mere suggestion that the question of Palestine was a disturbing factor of world peace, and was thus in need of a speedy and just solution.³ Two years later when the Second Conference convened in Addis Ababa, it merely expressed concern over the non-implementation of the Accra Resolution.⁴ While the governmental leaders of the Conference of Independent African States were reluctant to take a strong stand against Israel, the non-governmental representatives of the All African Peoples Conference were less restrained when they adopted a resolution which cited Israel as a perpetrator of neo-colonialism.⁵ Likewise, the Casablanca Conference—composed of Mali, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, United Arab Republic, Libya and the Provisional Government of Algeria—expressed deep concern over the situation in Palestine, and noted with indignation:

Israel has always taken the side of the imperialists each time an important position had to be taken concerning vital problems about Africa, notably Algeria, the Congo, and the nuclear tests in Africa, and the Conference therefore denounces Israel as an instrument in the service of imperialism and neo-colonialism not only in the Middle East but also in Africa and Asia.⁶

Colin Legum observed that Ghana was the only state of Black Africa with sufficient influence to have prevented the passage of such a resolution, but because she had deviated from the bloc on the important issue of the Congo, President Nkrumah found himself in the position of being unable to isolate himself further from the team.⁷

The OAU and the Arab-Israeli Dispute

When the OAU came into existence in 1963, the more "moderate" states of the Monrovia group were able to exert greater influence than the more "militant" countries associated with the Casablanca bloc. Thus this new continental organization was very reluctant to take a strong stand against Israel. In fact, continental unity was not easily achieved, since some leaders of Black Africa believed that Egypt would attempt to use the OAU as an instrument in her struggle against Israel. When the foreign ministers met to prepare the way for the creation of the Organization, the representative from Sierra Leone challenged his counterpart from

3. First Conference of Independent African States, Accra, 1958, *Resolutions*, Article 10, Section 9.

4. Second Conference of Independent African States, Addis Ababa, 1960, *Resolutions*, Article 1, Section 5.

5. All-African Peoples Conference, Cairo, 1961, *Resolution on Neo-Colonialism*.

6. The Casablanca Conference, Casablanca, 1961, *Resolution on Palestine*, Section 3.

7. Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 51.

Egypt to give assurance that his country's commitments between the Middle East and Africa were not in conflict.⁸ Egypt was seen by some observers as being first a part of the Middle East and second, an African country.

The question of Palestine was one of the potentially divisive issues facing the 1963 Summit Meeting of Heads of African State and Government. According to Legum, the African members of the Arab League decided not to seek a "showdown" with the Israeli supporters by introducing resolutions of condemnation before the Conference, but they did make speeches criticizing Israel.⁹ The Arabs' reluctance to push censuring resolutions, and Black Africa's unwillingness to accept the same, had the effect of neutralizing the Palestinian issue before the OAU during its formative years. Vincent Thompson observed that the Arab countries of North Africa were not likely to remain satisfied with a pacific or neutral position by the other African states, however, and thus the success of the Pan African movement could be seriously jeopardized.¹⁰ Thompson cited the address of President Bourguiba of Tunisia before the 1964 summit as proof of North Africa's dissatisfaction with Black Africa's lack of a commitment for the Arab cause. The Tunisian leader was quoted as saying that "Africans could not continue to speak of African unity while they ignore the plight of their brethren in the north of the continent who were fighting the Israelis."¹¹ In spite of the Arabs' intensified campaign to solicit OAU support for their cause, these efforts did not appear to yield fruits until after the Egyptian defeat in the June War of 1967. In the aftermath of that war, the OAU adopted a resolution which supported the cause of the United Arab Republic (UAR)—a member nation whose territory was partially under the occupation of a foreign power. The resolution pledged OAU support, through the United Nations, to secure the evacuation of the foreign power from the territory of the UAR.¹² A similar resolution was approved by the 1968 Summit.¹³

The 1969 resolution, in addition to reaffirming solidarity with the OAU, appealed to the "conscience of mankind" to protect the continent from further conflict which would have serious implications not only for Africa, but the rest of the world as well.¹⁴

In 1971 the OAU called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories in the three Arab countries of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, even though the latter two were not members of the OAU. Another major action of the Eighth Summit was the creation of a Commission of Ten which was requested to use its good office to effect a settlement in the Middle East. At the organizational meeting of the Commission in August 1971, a subcommittee composed of the leaders of

8. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Vincent Thompson, *Africa and Unity* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969, p. 290.

11. *Ibid.*

12. OAU, *Resolutions of Heads of State and Government*, 1967.

13. *Ibid.*, 1968.

14. *Ibid.*, 1969.

Nigeria, Zaïre, Senegal, and the Cameroun—was formed.* The “four wise men” were requested to contact all parties involved in the Middle East controversy, and to report their findings to the Commission.¹⁵ The *Jerusalem Post*, a major Israeli paper, expressed satisfaction with this action.

The appointment of the sub-committee has done much to remove the sting from the OAU resolution of last June which accused Israel of continuing aggression against the UAR.

The creation of the Committee of Ten and that of the Four, represents an important achievement for Israeli diplomacy in Africa. It has brought about the formation of two bodies which the scales are fairly evenly balanced rather than heavily tilted in favor of the Arabs as has frequently been the case in the past.¹⁶

In its report to the OAU, the Commission praised Egypt for its positive attitude and for the continuous efforts it was making for the restoration of peace. Israel, on the other hand, was criticized for a “negative and obstructive attitude,” which was impeding peacemaking efforts. After hearing the report of the Commission, the 1972 Summit invited Israel to declare publicly its adherence to the principle of non-acquisition of territories through the use of force. The 1972 resolution also called upon member states of the United Nations to cease supplying Israel with military equipment.¹⁷

The year 1972 was a crucial one for the Middle East—one which witnessed the beginning of the drift of African countries away from recognition of the State of Israel. Although Guinea had begun the procession following the outbreak of the 1967 war, other countries of Black Africa did not join the parade until 1972. In that year, Uganda, Chad and Congo-Brazzaville severed Israeli ties, and were followed by Niger and Mali during the first week of 1973. Several reasons have been advanced for these countries “turning their backs” on a former friend, including Israeli intransigence in regard to occupied Arab territories, religious solidarity and Arab foreign aid. In most cases, it appeared that a combination of factors, rather than any one reason, led to the break in relations.**

In the wake of the 1973 OAU Summit, Libya attempted to exert her influence in behalf of a more active involvement of the Organization in the Middle East

15. *Nigerian Bulletin on Foreign Affairs*, Vol. I, no. 2 (October 1971), p. 22.

16. *African Diary*, 1971, pp. 5644-45.

17. *Ibid.*, 1972, p. 6054.

* Member nations of the Commission of Ten were Mauritania, the Cameroun, Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Zaïre. The OAU, which had pledged in 1967 to work through the United Nations for the liberation of Arab lands, became more directly involved in 1971 owing to the failure of the Jarring Commission—which had been appointed by the United Nations for mediation efforts in compliance with Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967. The Commission of Ten was appointed to provide continued mediation in the dispute. Colin Legum (*African Contemporary Record*, 1973-74) observed that while its efforts were unsuccessful, they had come closer than those of any other international mediator in achieving peace in the area.

** For discussion of reasons for severance of relations see pages 403-7 below.

conflict. Colonel Qadhdhāfī called upon African nations to “harmonize their attitudes” toward Israel. He reminded them that Libya, in the past, had been deeply committed to the cause of African liberation, but presently, Israel was perceived as being a greater threat than the racial régimes of Southern Africa since the former was based upon colonization and destruction. The Libyan leader noted with indignation that Israel continues to occupy a portion of the territory of Egypt, the largest country in Africa.¹⁸ In the attempt to persuade countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Libya “played up” the theme of similarities between Israel and South Africa. The Libyan leader demanded that all nations of the OAU break relations with Israel as an act of solidarity with Egypt. Ethiopia, in particular, was called upon to sever Israeli ties, and to expel its embassy from Addis Ababa, or consent to the transfer of the OAU headquarters to another African capital—preferably Cairo.¹⁹ The Libyan delegate to the Foreign Ministers’ Conference of 1973 further emphasized the demand:

There are those among us who support Zionists and colonialists and those who allow Israel to deal with South Africa—I mean Ethiopia. Those who assist our enemies are the same as our enemies.²⁰

Ethiopia replied to the demand by outlining her historical and cultural affinities with Arab neighbors. The Ethiopian leader called attention to the continuous support of his country on all resolutions of the United Nations in regard to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Arab lands. The Emperor reminded the Libyans that Ethiopia’s relations with Israel did not affect her position in regard to international law, and the cause of justice in the Middle East.²¹

In spite of the Libyan campaign for greater African support, countries of sub-Saharan Africa did not enter a stampede to break relations with Israel, nor did they seek to remove the OAU headquarters from Addis Ababa. The OAU avoided what had at first appeared to be a major disaster for the tenth anniversary of the Organization. The Heads of State and Government approved a resolution which expressed satisfaction that the UAR had sought to achieve a just and durable solution to the crisis. This effort was seen as being met by Israeli intransigence, however. In its resolution, the OAU noted that the systematic refusal of Israel to abide by the will of the international community constituted a threat to the security of the continent. Israel’s attention was called to the danger threatening the continent because of her continued aggression, and her refusal to evacuate the occupied territories. She was further warned that her irreconcilable attitude might lead OAU members, either collectively or individually, to pursue political and/or economic measures against her.²² Although the resolution of 1973 was more demanding than

18. Colin Legum in *The Observer*, May 13, 1973.

19. Stanley Meisler in *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1973.

20. Thomas A. Johnson in *New York Times*, March 19, 1973.

21. Legum, *The Observer*, *op. cit.*

22. OAU, *op. cit.*, 1973.

previous ones, it did not achieve the results desired by the Libyans, who had campaigned for more militant action. In spite of the passage of the resolution, many delegates left Addis Ababa dissatisfied—some because they felt that the OAU was unwilling to commit itself fully to the cause, and others because they believed they were being overly pressured.

When the fourth Middle East war erupted in 1973, the OAU, as an organization, was unable to make an immediate response since neither its Council of Ministers nor Assembly of Heads of State and Government was in session. There were early indications of continental and regional support for the Arab cause, however. The Liberation Committee of the OAU, which met during the course of the war, passed a resolution calling upon Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. Member states were asked to invoke political and economic sanction against Israel because of her refusal to withdraw from Arab land.²³ The OAU convened an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers in Addis Ababa, November 19-21, 1973. The foreign ministers noted that the Middle East was once again involved in a war which had been provoked by Israeli expansionist policies. The representatives who attended the OAU meeting concluded that the 1973 conflict had revealed the open collusion between Portuguese colonialism, the apartheid régimes and Zionism. They further noted:

The open military collusion between the United States, Portugal, South Africa, Rhodesia and Israel during the recent Middle East War further confirms the justification of the preoccupation of the African and Arab countries and has further strengthened their conviction in the need for a common struggle.²⁴

The OAU sought to strengthen Arab-African unity by recommending oil sanctions against the white ruled régimes of Southern Africa. Mr. Nzo Ekanganki, the Secretary General of the OAU, in replying to a message from President Sādāt of Egypt, expressed concern over the situation in the Middle East. With the "active solidarity" of members of the OAU, the Secretary General predicted success for the Arab cause.²⁵ Mr. Ekanganki's pledge of support made him a center of controversy. The *Daily Nation*, a leading Kenyan paper, criticized him for having exceeded the scope of his authority. The editorial read:

The OAU Secretary-General could not commit so many countries to the question of war and peace—a prerogative which properly belonged to sovereign states and their populations.²⁶

The *Nation* called the Secretary General's statement "irresponsible and lacking in sound judgment."

23. *Daily Graphic* (Ghana) October 29, 1973.

24. OAU Council of Ministers, *Resolutions*, November 19-21, 1973.

25. *Daily Nation* (Kenya) October 10, 1973.

26. *Ibid.*, October 11, 1973.

The Arab cause also won support from non-OAU organizations. The "Good Neighbor"* group met in Dar es Salaam, November 22-24, 1973, and condemned the "unholy alliance" between South Africa, Portugal, Rhodesia and Israel.²⁷ African organizations, in adopting resolutions censuring Israel, were merely reflecting policies of the various governments—almost all of which had disassociated themselves from Israel by the time of the meeting of the Council of Ministers in November.

The new African approach to Israel is also having its impact upon the United Nations and related bodies. The majority of the African states refused to identify themselves with anti-Israeli resolutions prior to the 1967 war, and until the 1973 encounter, African nations were reluctant to lend their support to Arab causes. Following the most recent war, however, African states have solidified their efforts, and have joined with other Third World nations to isolate Israel in international organizations. In recent months majorities in the General Assembly have not only censured Israel for her behavior in the Middle East, but have also granted an "international recognition" to the Palestine Liberation Organization, and accepted its leader, Yāsir 'Arafāt, in the manner of a chief of state. Anti-Israel actions have also been taken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. African unity now appears to be a major factor in international organizations.

African Nations and the 1973 Crisis

Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly, President Mobutu of Zaïre announced that, regretfully, a choice had to be made between a friend and a brother, and his country had chosen kinship over friendship. Mobutu noted, however, that Zaïre would gladly renew relations whenever Israel returned the occupied territories to the Arabs.²⁸ Reacting to the severing of relations by Zaïre, Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban called the decision of President Mobutu a gross betrayal of international friendship and goodwill. According to the Foreign Minister, never had any policy in the past, on the part of Israel, done any harm to Zaïre. On the contrary, he insisted, Israel had always cooperated with Zaïre in moments of trial and danger.²⁹ The severing of diplomatic relations by Zaïre was hailed by the Arab supporters in sub-Saharan Africa as a significant break in the once solid ranks

27. *African Research Bulletin*, Vol. X, 1973, p. 3044.

28. *Christian Science Monitor*, October 15, 1973.

29. *Daily Graphic*, October 6, 1973.

* The "Good Neighbor" group is composed of nations of East and Central Africa which meet periodically to discuss problems which, if left unsolved, would rupture peaceful relations in the region.

of Israeli supporters. The action of Zaïre was later followed by a train of other African nations which severed diplomatic relations within the next month.*

Ethiopia, a long time friend of Israel, and frequently a critic of Arab intrusion into the internal affairs of African countries,** severed relations with the Israelis after much soul searching. The statement by the government read:

Consistent with her stand on opposing territorial annexation, Ethiopia has done her best to effect the withdrawal of Israel from the territories of Egypt, Jordan and Syria which she occupied in 1967.³⁰

According to the communiqué, Ethiopia believed that no lasting peace could be achieved as long as Israel remained in Arab territories. The statement continued:

Because Israel has failed to withdraw from the occupied territories, Ethiopia has decided to sever diplomatic relations with Israel until such time that Israel withdraws from the occupied territories.³¹

General Gowon, then the Nigerian Head of State, and the Chairman of the OAU (1973-74), had attempted to mediate the dispute, but when these efforts failed, he called upon the African group at the United Nations to give full diplomatic support to Egypt in the current conflict.³² Later, Nigeria broke relations with Israel, accusing her of "bad faith" in crossing to the west bank of the Suez Canal, and taking advantage of the cease fire.³³ According to General Gowon, the war in the Middle East could have been avoided if Israel had implemented the resolution of the 1967 General Assembly. He blamed Israel for not withdrawing from occupied Arab land.³⁴ The *Nigerian Tribune* was very critical of the action of its government. It editorialized:

At the very best, it will please the ears of the Arab leaders; at the worst it will isolate Israel. But the immediate effects of breaking relations with Israel is to deprive the African countries concerned of any direct source of influencing Israeli policy in this or any other matters.³⁵

30. *Ethiopian Herald*, October 24, 1973.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Christian Science Monitor*, October 15, 1973.

33. *Washington Post*, October 26, 1973.

34. *West Africa*, October 15, 1973.

35. *Nigerian Tribune*, October 16, 1973.

* African countries which severed relations with Israel during the period October 4-November 8, 1973, were: Dahomey, Rwanda, Mauritania, Upper Volta, Cameroun, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, Malagasy Republic, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zambia, Gambia, Senegal, Ghana, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Kenya.

** Disillusionment with her Islamic neighbors because of their continued support of the Muslim-dominated secessionists of Eritrea appeared to have been a major factor in Ethiopia's resistance to an earlier breaking of Israeli ties. Ethiopia was especially angered by a resolution of the Fourth Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference of 1973 which had supported the "legitimate struggle" of the Eritrean people.

Ghana was urged by the *Daily Graphic* to follow the lead of other African countries and sever Israeli ties. It noted:

African countries which maintain relations with Israel do so at the grave danger of undermining their own security and selling their dignity and birthright to anti-African racist regimes which aim at exterminating us from the continent.³⁶

When Ghana severed relations on the 27th of October, the government's communiqué noted that Ghana had never hesitated to express objection to the acquisition of African territory by force, but at the same time, it had supported a just and peaceful solution to the Middle East crisis.³⁷

Felix Houphouët-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast, was very reluctant to sever Israeli ties. He saw himself as being in a position to exert influence on both parties. He observed:

Our greatest shortcoming is our faithfulness. We do not change friends everyday. Some have reasons of their own to break with Israel. As for us, it is out of the question. Besides how could I exercise an influence on the Israelis if I had no diplomatic relations with them.³⁸

The Ivorian leader called attention to his recent meetings with the foreign ministers of Egypt and Syria. In spite of the announced intention, the Ivory Coast reluctantly joined the procession of nations which broke relations with Israel following the outbreak of the 1973 war.

The position of Senegal was similar to that of the Ivory Coast. As stated earlier, President Senghor of Senegal was the leader of the "four wise men" who sought to bring about a settlement in the Middle East. Prior to Senegal's break with Israel, President Senghor criticized countries which had broken Israeli ties—emphasizing that he did not consider this to be an effective means of restoring peace to the Middle East.³⁹

Of all the countries of Black Africa which severed relations with Israel, Uganda was the most vocal in her criticisms. According to some observers, the military government had blamed Israel for failing to supply it with needed weapons to repel the alleged Tanzanian invasion. Likewise, General Idi Amin had displayed bitterness over Israeli press coverage of Uganda prior to the interruption of diplomatic relations in March 1972. The Israeli government, on the other hand, saw the rupture of relations as resulting from a February 13, 1972, visit of President Amin to Libya. During this visit a communiqué was issued which noted the pledge of the two African leaders to support the Arabs in their "struggle against Zionism and

36. *Daily Graphic*, October 6, 1973.

37. *Ibid.*, October 29, 1973.

38. *Christian Science Monitor*, October 15, 1973.

39. *Washington Post*, October 14, 1973.

Imperialism, for the liberation of confiscated lands, and for the right of the Palestinian people to return to their land and homes by all means."⁴⁰ Libyan financial commitments to the Amin government were seen by Israeli officials as being a major reason for the Ugandans' hostile attitude toward Israel. In spite of its disappointment, the Israeli government expressed confidence that the Ugandan severance of relations would be only a temporary act:

Israel trusts that a day will come when the brusque ending of a decade of cooperation will be regarded by the people of Uganda as a strange interlude, and the traditional friendship between the two countries will be resumed.⁴¹

Nineteen months later when the October War erupted, General Idi Amin traveled from capital to capital in the Middle East proclaiming solidarity with the Arab cause. While in Damascus, the Ugandan leader remarked to a news conference, "You will see Ugandan forces on both fronts against the Zionist aggressors."⁴² The General pledged to lead the Ugandan volunteers in person. General Amin also challenged the United States by threatening to break diplomatic relations, and to jail Americans in Uganda if she joined in the fighting in the Middle East.⁴³

In October-November 1973 nearly a score of nations in Black Africa broke relations with Israel. Many African leaders hailed this as a dramatic show of African solidarity—a long-sought objective. In order to secure a better understanding of the interactions between Africa and the Middle East during this period, however, one needs to pose two basic questions: (1) Why did African countries sever relations with Israel? and (2) What was the impact of this severance?

Severance of Relations: An Analysis

Several reasons have been cited for the breaking of relations, including: (1) Israel's defiance of international opinion, (2) continued Israeli occupation of a portion of the territory of Egypt—a sister republic, (3) the success of the Arab campaign for greater support among nations in Black Africa, (4) the growing influence of Islam as a religious force in sub-Saharan Africa, and (5) the early successes of the Arabs in the 1973 war.

Although Israeli defiance of international opinion was frequently cited as a cause for severance, many observers question this contention since nations often defy international opinion with impunity—including the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China and France. Few nations have severed relations with these major powers because of such defiance. Secondly, since Israel has consistently defied international opinion, one may ask—why the break at this point in time?

40. Israel Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Israel and Uganda* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1972), p. 14.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

42. *Washington Post*, October 17, 1973.

43. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1973.

Defiance of international opinion appeared to provide a rationale for nations seeking to sever relations because of other reasons—perhaps less acceptable ones. It is believed that this justification could have been a secondary reason for breaking ties, but it would be difficult to conclude that it was the major consideration.

Continued Israeli occupation of a portion of Egypt was also advanced as a reason for Black Africa's estrangement from Israel. Critics of this theory, however, point out that a portion of Egyptian territory has been occupied by Israel since 1967, thus—why the six year delay in reacting to the occupation? A crucial factor which existed in 1973, however, was the Israeli advance across the west bank of the Suez into Africa, and their movement toward Cairo. Israel, thus, was not only seen as "refusing to return Arab lands" but "penetrating into additional territory."

Arab diplomatic efforts have also been cited as a major factor in the breaking of ties between countries of Black Africa and Israel. It has been argued that Arab money—Libyan in particular—had purchased the severance of relations.⁴⁴ Given the extent of Israeli foreign aid commitments to Africa prior to 1973, it is understandable why countries of Black Africa would seek a guarantee that the loss of aid, due to the severance, would be replaced by assistance from Arab sources. There are two other aspects of Arab diplomacy which one should consider. Arab diplomats have constantly reminded Black Africans that the fight against Israeli aggression in the North has a close relationship to the struggle against white minority governments in the South; thus, in order to secure full Arab support for the call of liberation of the continent from racists, Black Africa has to be willing to respond favorably to the Arabs' call for support against Israeli aggression. Several African nations were disturbed over alleged Arab interference in their internal affairs. Ethiopia and Chad were among the countries which had accused the Arabs of supporting secessionist movements within their respective borders. Libya was said to have used effective diplomacy when she promised to discontinue her support for the Arab-Muslim insurrection in Chad, if the latter would agree to break Israeli ties.⁴⁵ Apparently, Arab diplomacy, buttressed by foreign aid, did achieve limited success during the 1973 conflict.

Fourthly, religion was seen as a factor which motivated the breaking of relations by African countries with large Muslim populations. An analysis of the Muslim content of the countries which have broken relations with Israel, however, leaves one with inconclusive evidence as to the weight of the religious factor in the severance of diplomatic ties. While it is true that Guinea, Chad, Niger, and Mali—all countries with predominantly Muslim populations—were among the first nations to sever relations with Israel, it is also true that Senegal—whose population is Muslim—was among the most reluctant to break Israeli ties. Senegal refused to view the conflict as a religious one. Her external relations director noted:

44. *Christian Science Monitor*, October 3, 1973.

45. *Washington Evening Star*, February 7, 1973.

We are predominantly a Moslem country but we are not Arabs, and while we sympathize with the Arabs we do not share the same overall outlook. Our position is also clear that we are against the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. But we contend that the Middle Eastern problem is one of politics and not one of religion.⁴⁶

A similar view was taken by a major Kenyan paper in challenging the National Union of Kenya Muslims, which had urged all Kenyans of that faith to pray for the defeat of Israel in the war of 1973. The *Daily Nation* contended that the war was not a holy one, since such a war is not one between Jews and Muslims, but one between the Muslims and non-believers, and one which is fought only when the religion is in jeopardy.⁴⁷ The paper did not see the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis over territories as being a threat to the Islamic faith since its survival was not dependent upon the existence of Arab nations. It is believed, however, that most countries with heavy concentrations of Muslims were under extreme pressure to break with Israel, and when the religious factor was translated into politics, severance of Israeli ties had to be given serious consideration.

Lastly, the fact that the Arabs had made a "better showing" in the 1973 war than in previous conflicts, was seen as a psychological boost, and was thus believed to have been a factor in some African leaders throwing their support to the Arab cause. Other observers embraced an opposite view, maintaining that the fear of a deep penetration of Israeli troops into Egypt produced anxiety in Black Africa, and caused her to declare solidarity with a fellow African nation.

No one reason appears to exist to explain why almost every nation of Black Africa had terminated relations with Israel by the end of 1973. While some governments severed ties primarily for one or more of the reasons cited above, others probably played the rôle of following the herd. In some cases the reasons for the breaks are stated in the communiqués of the governments, but in others, these statements appeared to disguise real causes. Apparently, countries which terminated Israeli relations had objectives which they sought to accomplish. How well did they achieve these goals? In order to shed more light on this subject we turn our attention to the impact of the mass defection from Israel.

As suggested earlier in this paper, the severance of relations by countries of Black Africa, in support of the Arab cause, was a dramatic display of continental unity. In terms of effects upon the Middle East crisis, however, we have not been able to identify a direct correlation between the severance of relations and the "less intransigent" post-1973 Israeli policies. The *East African Standard* of Kenya, however, concluded that the hardening of African opinion against Israel had exerted a strong influence on the Israeli attitude.⁴⁸ The *Nigerian Tribune* differed with the *Standard*, and questioned the effectiveness of the technique of severing relations.⁴⁹

46. Johnson, *op. cit.*, March 19, 1973.

47. *Daily Nation*, October 17, 1973.

48. *East African Standard* (Kenya), November 2, 1973.

49. *Nigerian Tribune*, October 16, 1973.

Likewise, Chege Mbitiru, writing in the *Sunday Nation* of Kenya, was not convinced of the value of such breaks in relations. He wrote: "If Israel is an agent of the imperialists, would it not only be more honest to break relations with, and to expel, the imperialists themselves."⁵⁰ Dr. Emiko Atimons, of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, advised that the rupture of diplomatic relations in the present international system has very limited effects.⁵¹ He saw the weapon as being meaningless without the sympathetic country giving material support to the ally, and following up the break with workable sanctions. Few African states followed up the interruption of relations with tangible support for the Arabs. After breaking ties, Ugandan authorities converted the Israeli embassy in Kampala into a headquarters for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Likewise, Chad's President Tombalbaye announced that he would open the doors of Chad to Palestinians so they could fight the agents of imperialism (Zionism).⁵² When the 1973 war erupted, Chad offered to airlift supplies to the Egyptian front lines,⁵³ and Idi Amin threatened to lead Ugandan soldiers into combat on behalf of the Arabs. The *Daily Nation*, however, accused Amin of merely making empty gestures.⁵⁴

A major assumption had been that the mass severance of relations by countries of Black Africa would achieve the international isolation of Israel. Through various United Nations resolutions of the past, South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia had been condemned for their racial practices, and thus had been "isolated" from the international community. In their attempt to have Israel included on this list, the Arabs sought to win the support of countries of Black Africa by constantly reminding them that the struggles above and below the Sahara were closely related. President Boumedienne of Algeria, perhaps, best summarized the Arab feeling when he warned:

Africa cannot adopt one attitude toward colonialism in southern Africa and a completely different one toward Zionist colonialism in northern Africa.⁵⁵

The mass defection of countries of Black Africa from Israel was thus seen as a victory for Arab diplomacy, which had sought to further isolate the Israelis. The desertion, however, apparently gave Israel a reason to renew diplomatic offensives on other fronts. South Africa and Portugal had been among the few "friends" of Israel during the October War, thus it was not surprising when Israel responded to overtures by South Africa, and appointed its first ambassador after a 15 year period of coolness. A communiqué issued by the Israeli government read:

50. *Sunday Nation* (Kenya), October 28, 1973.

51. *Afriscopes*, December 1973, p. 30.

52. Decraene, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

53. *Washington Post*, October 17, 1973.

54. *Daily Nation*, October 17, 1973.

55. *Washington Evening Star and Daily News*, May 26, 1973.

We oppose racial discrimination as a matter of profound inner conviction. But we feel that Israel should have normal diplomatic relations with all countries of the world.⁵⁶

Was Israel "pushed" by Black Africa's desertion into the embrace of white minority governments of Southern Africa, or was she merely proclaiming publicly a policy which she had adhered to secretly in the past? These are questions currently being asked by Black Africans.

The Middle East Crisis and Continental Unity

The newly found "brotherhood" of Black Africans and Arabs was hailed by third-worlders as an affair which would mark the beginning of a new era in international politics. In Africa, it was believed that much of the divisiveness which for so long had plagued efforts to create African unity had now disappeared. The test of true unity, however, could not be measured by the degree of opposition to Israel since Africans, in the past, had been able to produce their greatest solidarity when confronted by colonial-related problems—and Israel had now been classified as an imperialist. The extent to which African nations can maintain their enthusiasm for the unity achieved in 1973 is too early to determine; however, there are indications that some of the links of the chains are weakening. The oil boycott—a crucial weapon which had worked for the success of the Arab cause in the October War—produced serious consequences for Black Africa which had not been foreseen. According to an OAU report, 33 African countries were seriously affected by the Arab oil boycott—11 of which had their own oil refineries, but had to import oil, and 22 countries which had to import refined oil.⁵⁷ The seriousness of the oil crisis necessitated the formation of a special committee to discuss the problem with the Arab oil producers. At a meeting in Cairo, the producers rejected the African demand for a two tier pricing system which would have permitted African states to purchase supplies at a price below that of the world market. The producers, instead, promised to make available to the Africans all the oil they needed, and to establish a \$200 million fund to provide loans at one per cent interest.⁵⁸ At the 1974 OAU Council of Ministers' meeting in Mogadishu, the delegates accepted the offer, but Kenya, Ethiopia and other countries objected to the suggested amount, feeling that the Arab producers should have offered no less than \$420 million. The delegates also asked its special committee to suggest that the funds be deposited in the African Development Bank, rather than placed into a special bank created for that purpose, as advocated by the producers.⁵⁹

56. *Afro-American*, April 9-13, 1974.

57. *OAU News Bulletin*, February-March 1974.

58. *Washington Post*, February 17, 1974.

59. Johnson, *op. cit.*, May 10, 1974.

The OAU Summit of 1974 expressed pleasure over the oil embargo which had been instituted against its traditional enemies—Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia. An observer noted, however, that the oil boycott of South Africa had virtually brought to a standstill the economies of those African countries which had relied upon South African ports for receiving their oil.⁶⁰

In the summer of 1974 when the OAU meeting of Heads of State and Government convened, the “continental unity” which had been achieved during the October War was not as visible. Contending factions fought over the naming of a new Secretary General for the OAU, with neither of the leading candidates successfully obtaining the office. Henry Hayward of the *Christian Science Monitor* attempted to relate this political struggle to Black Africa’s dissatisfaction with the Arabs’ limited efforts in regard to the adjustment of oil prices for African customers,⁶¹ while the *Washington Post* saw the struggle as an attempt to prevent the further “Arabization” of the OAU.⁶²

When the 1975 African Summit convened in Kampala, Uganda, it was generally anticipated that the OAU would follow the lead of the 40 member Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers and approve a resolution calling for expulsion of Israel from the UN. Such was not the case, however. Egypt, which was engaged in “optimistic negotiations” in regard to the Middle East conflict, joined with nations of Black Africa in rejecting the strongly worded PLO and Libyan sponsored resolution. Egypt also withdrew her own resolution and supported one which called for the eventual deprivation of Israeli UN membership if she did not evacuate Arab territories. Thus the 1975 summit did not only emphasize the division between Blacks and Arabs of Africa but it underscored friction among African Arabs as well.

Arabs of the North share a common continent with Blacks of sub-Saharan Africa, but likewise the Northerners share a common culture and religion with non-African countries of the Middle East. In some cases, the interest of peoples of all these regions will appear to be a common one, but in others, they may be in sharp conflict. African unity in regard to the Middle East crisis is likely to be based upon what can be gained by the individual country in pursuing a certain course of action—in other words, what it perceives to be advantageous. Hence, continental unity on this basic issue is likely to remain intact only to the extent that the interests of the Arabs of North Africa and the Blacks of sub-Saharan Africa coincide. One should be aware of the fact, however, that the degree of wealth, as well as religious beliefs, are likely to be major factors which will influence future relations between North and sub-Saharan Africa, and consequently, Black Africa’s attitude toward Israel.

60. *Washington Post*, February 17, 1974.

61. *Christian Science Monitor*, June 21, 1974.

62. *Washington Post*, June 17, 1974.