

Israel's Exit from Africa, 1973: The Road to Diplomatic Isolation

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ABSTRACT *In 1973 25 Black African states severed diplomatic relations with Israel. This article examines the motives that brought the African countries to shun Israel and the manner in which the Israelis attempted to cope with their growing 'pariah' status. The African states sought to achieve unity on their continent, avoid their own isolation, and advance the international norms that they espoused. The Black African countries claimed that no hostility attended their decisions to break ties with Israel. Yet, as this article demonstrates, their imposition of a quarantine on Israel was an act of indirect violence. By early 1974 officials of the Israeli Foreign Ministry attempted a reformulation of policy toward Black Africa but could ameliorate in no effective manner the isolation imposed upon their country.*

Researchers of international relations have made little use of archival resources in order to assess the manner in which isolated states have dealt with their alienation. Recently declassified files in the Israel State Archives make possible an analysis of Israel's attempt to cope with the decisions of 25 'Black' African states in 1973 to sever relations with it. This article draws primarily upon those documents in order to highlight the paradox that from late 1973 attended the sharp deterioration of Israel's international position. The African states intended neither to quarantine Israel nor turn it into a pariah. The absence of such a purpose notwithstanding, the actions those states took imposed upon Israel an immediate diplomatic crisis and a deepening isolation in the international system.

The present research juxtaposes the success of Israel's diplomacy in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s with the rapid deterioration of its position in late 1973. This work demonstrates that Israel had little influence over the circumstances that brought about the rupture, no means with which to halt the dynamic of successive breaks, and few diplomatic instruments with which to ameliorate the impairment of its international position. At the same time the African countries, most within a short period of time in 1973, moved to shun a state with which they had conducted, since their independence, relations in which they saw utility. Those countries feared disunity on their continent, wished (themselves) to avoid isolation, strove to advance international norms that they espoused, and, during the 1973 Middle East crisis, sought relief from the effects of the sudden rise in the price of oil.

Four observations regarding isolated states place in context the circumstances that attended the 1973 African break with Israel. First, this was not the type of

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isolation that K.J. Holsti considers an alternative in a state's choice of foreign policy orientation. The alienation that Israel experienced was enforced, and a state in such a situation is the object of 'exile' or 'quarantine'. The kind of isolated state examined here neither avoids diplomatic commitments nor pursues exclusionist policies. The subject of this study is a state that others have shunned.¹

Second, as Harkavy notes, certain features usually characterise such an actor. These are its limited capacity to exercise sway over other states, precarious strategic situation, and diminished degree of legitimacy. An isolated state is most likely to be a small country with little diplomatic leverage. That state is often outnumbered by surrounding adversaries that challenge the validity of its existing borders, deny its right to self-determination, and object to its national origins. Such a state typically suffers exclusion from inter-governmental organisations, and that limits its ability to buy or sell arms, obtain military assistance, and function without hindrance on the economic and cultural planes.²

Third, symbolism may have real consequences for a state that other states shun. In the 1960s and 1970s the growing role of ideology in world politics invested international organisations and the 'collective-security myth' with a heightened symbolic importance, as the developing states created their own fora and gained a greater voice in the United Nations. The desire for conformity induced those governments to dress their interests in a veneer of moral superiority, bringing them to join other countries when the consensus of opprobrium formed against a state held to be in violation of their values.³

Fourth, a case study of isolation makes exigent identification of the primary initiator of ostracism. The Arab states attempted to proscribe Israel's ability to function in a normal diplomatic manner. The exhortation of the Arab states and rising peer pressure motivated most of the African states in 1973 to sever diplomatic ties with Israel, but a few remarks about the actions of the African countries are in order. The African governments took issue with Israeli policies, but unlike the Arab states, they neither objected to the nature of Israel's regime nor questioned its right to exist. They wished to alter Israel's behaviour and could have imposed 'incremental isolation' in the form of gradual sanctions. The fact that they did not proceed in measured terms, instead abruptly rupturing ties, forced Israel to deal with the suddenness of what Geldenhuys calls 'galloping isolation'. Thus, Israel's very success in Africa afforded the Arab states the opportunity to deal it a grave diplomatic setback by recruiting to their cause the countries with which the Israelis had created close ties.

Israel's Diplomacy in Africa: An Overview

As late as 1957 Israel maintained only seven embassies, six of these in Europe and North America. Israel's diplomatic efforts in Asia had yielded little success, and in April 1955 it was excluded from the Bandung conference of non-aligned countries. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the transfer of power from colonial authorities to new states in Africa created the opportunity for a dramatic turn in

¹ The most comprehensive treatment of isolation is that of Deon Geldenhuys, *Isolated States: A Comparative Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Robert Harkavy, 'The Pariah State Syndrome', *Orbis* xxi, (1977), pp. 623–649; K.J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); Efraim Inbar, *Outcast Countries in the World Community* (Denver, CO: University of Denver, 1985).

² Harkavy, 'Pariah State Syndrome', p. 627; Geldenhuys, *Isolated States*, pp. 17–18.

³ Geldenhuys, *Isolated States*, p. 7.

Israel's diplomatic position. In March 1957 the Gold Coast became independent Ghana, and Israel developed an extraordinarily close relationship with that country. In 1960 and 1961 16 Black African countries reached statehood. Among these, only Mauritania and Somalia, both of which eventually joined the Arab League, refused to establish relations with Israel. The 1967 Six Day War brought the African states to the view that Israel's occupation of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula constituted an encroachment upon African territory. Nevertheless, Guinea was the only African state to sever ties, and in 1971 Israel still had diplomatic relations with 32 African countries.⁴

Israel lost ground when, from March 1972 to May 1973, six African states severed relations with it. On 30 March 1972 Idi Amin, president of Uganda, abruptly terminated the close relationship that Israel had cultivated with his country. Israel considered Amin's break damaging to its image but viewed it as the caprice of a disturbed dictator and thus limited in effect. Between late November 1972 and early January 1973 Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Mali, and Niger severed their relations with Israel, and in May 1973 Burundi did so. Some Israeli diplomats pointed out that these were not 'leading states' and noted that Israel still had ties with 27 African countries.⁵ Yet, other officials acknowledged that the 'winds on the continent' were blowing against Israel and expressed trepidation that such severances would become an 'epidemic'.⁶ In October and November 1973, twenty-one Black African states broke off ties and by mid-November 1973 only four of them maintained diplomatic relations with Israel.

Six salient aspects of Israel's relations with the Black African states warrant note. First, the large number of files on Africa in the Israeli archives reflects the importance that Israel attached to that continent, and we should view Africa in the broader perspective of its place in Israel's foreign policy. The Black African states could supply Israel with no arms, economic aid, or immigrants. Nevertheless, Israeli leaders such as David Ben Gurion (prime minister from 1948 to 1953 and 1955 to 1963) and Golda Meir (foreign minister from 1956 to 1966, prime minister from 1969 to 1974), though highly pragmatic, were idealistic in their desire to play a role in the liberation of other peoples. Moreover, during the first years of its diplomatic activity in Black Africa, Israel attempted to present itself as a state identified with neither side in the Cold War and primarily a source of civilian rather than military aid. Israel did so partly in order to prevent the Black African states from joining future anti-Israeli campaigns at the United Nations based on such issues as water, borders, and refugees, which were components of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of great concern to the Africans.⁷ That is why the Foreign Ministry sent many of Israel's most talented diplomats to serve on that continent.

A second aspect of Israel's entry to Africa is the change that by the late 1950s marked its strategic focus. Israel sought to create ties in the regions beyond the Arab confrontation states, and this was the basis of its 'doctrine of the periphery'. For that reason, during the 1960s Israel exploited every opportunity to establish relations with African countries reaching independence and developed close

⁴ For accounts of Israel in Africa see Samuel Decalo, *Israel and Africa: Forty Years, 1956–1996* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1998); Alusola Ojo, *Africa and Israel: Relations in Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988); Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (London: British Academic Press, 1992).

⁵ Embassy at Abidjan to Foreign Ministry, 27 March 1973, Israel State Archives (henceforth ISA), 5345/18.

⁶ Dafni to Africa Division 'B' (West Africa), 8 December 1972, ISA 5363/24.

⁷ Ilan to Foreign Ministry, 17 March 1961, ISA 3301/1.

defence relations with a growing number of them. By the mid-1960s Israel worked mainly to secure its flank in order to ensure freedom of navigation along the Red Sea and friendly ports there. This goal also made particularly important the 'hinterland' to Ethiopia; the East African states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

A third feature is the prominent role of the staff of the Israeli Foreign Ministry in both the formulation and execution of policy toward Africa. Golda Meir was very closely involved with Africa and visited that continent frequently. Meir regarded Africa as a domain to be guarded against the intrusion of the more powerful Israeli Defence Ministry, seeking an area in which she could work with complete authority.⁸ Abba Eban, who in 1966 replaced Meir, left the management of affairs in Africa in greater measure to his subordinates, and for that reason, the reports during his tenure of both officials at the Foreign Ministry and its envoys in the African capitals are particularly salient. The protocols of Israeli cabinet meetings will remain classified for a period of 50 years and files of the Mossad (Israel's external intelligence agency) and Defence Ministry remain closed, further heightening the importance of the records of the Foreign Ministry.

A fourth facet of Israel's presence in Africa was the competition that the Foreign Ministry faced from the Defence Ministry. By the late 1960s this rivalry had turned into a 'turf war' in Africa, and the Foreign Ministry accused the Defence Ministry of activities deleterious to Israel's interests on the continent. The Defence Ministry wished to develop an arms market in Africa with regular contracts for military supplies to those states.⁹ The Foreign Ministry protested what it termed the Defence Ministry's 'security empire' there.¹⁰ The Foreign Ministry accepted the exigency of close defence ties with Ethiopia, because that country was Israel's most important strategic connection in Africa. But Israel's diplomats objected to the sale of weapons to 'disreputable dictatorships', the most egregious of which they considered Uganda. In their view, the supply of heavy arms to the Amin regime that included tanks tarnished the reputation that Israel had through civilian aid worked to create in Africa. The present study relates the Foreign Ministry's view of the role of its bureaucratic rival in the deterioration of Israel's status in Africa.

Fifth, the 'African break' took place on the background of the 1973 Yom Kippur war. The fighting began on 6 October 1973 and largely ended on 24 October with a ceasefire, but during the following months the crisis continued to occupy Israel's decision makers. The Yom Kippur war was the catalyst for the decisions of most of the Black African states to break ties with Israel, and their actions were part of the diplomatic consequences for Israel of the military crisis. Ten African states severed ties with Israel during the war, and another 10 did so during the 3 weeks that followed the ceasefire agreement. In the absence of an emergency of that magnitude, such a severe diplomatic setback would have been the principal issue on the agenda of the country's top decision makers. In the circumstances that the war created, Israel's diplomatic community played a role in dealing with the African break more pronounced than would otherwise have been the case.

Sixth, it is important to note that the African states were not a monolithic bloc, and Israel did not view them in that manner. The African countries that broke ties with Israel did so in response to Arab demands, an international environment that by

⁸ Meron Medzini, *The Proud Jewess* (Tel-Aviv: Edanim, 1990, in Hebrew), p. 273.

⁹ Interview with Hanan Bar-On (former director-general, Israeli Foreign Ministry), 10 October 2000, Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Bitan to Eban, 27 September 1966, ISA 3993/17.

1973 grew increasingly hostile toward Israel, and the mounting pressure upon the African governments that had by late October 1973 not severed relations with the Jewish state. The archival record of the period between 4 October 1973, when Zaire severed relations with Israel, and 13 November, when Botswana did so, makes evident that Israel's diplomats worked *vis-à-vis* all of those governments to prevent those ruptures, in almost no instance assuming the inevitability of a break in ties.

Those efforts notwithstanding, the Foreign Ministry could not prevent the narrowing of Israel's diplomatic purview, and three stages mark the dynamic of that contraction. The first is that of the 18 months from Amin's turn against Israel to the beginning of the Yom Kippur war. During that time Israel sought to contain the damage that the Uganda affair had done its reputation and ensure that no more African governments follow suit. A second stage was the 6-week period that began on 4 October 1973 (two days before the outbreak of war) with Zaire's notice of its diplomatic break with Israel. At that point Israeli officials thought that they could avert a 'chain reaction' of severances and worked in both the African capitals and the United Nations to prevent it.

A third period of about six months commenced in mid-November 1973 after Botswana, the last of the African states to sever relations with Israel, had ruptured those ties. During that period the paradox marking the African states' break with Israel manifested itself. The African states insisted that their actions were peaceful, yet as Geldenhuys notes, even if states imposing isolation view that measure in such a manner, the consequences may not be entirely so. That is because the impact of isolation upon the target state makes its implementation a form of indirect violence.¹¹ The decisions of the Black African states had that effect upon Israel even if we should not impute to them such intent. Thus, from late November 1973 to mid-May 1974 the Foreign Ministry formulated, in an incremental manner, the guidelines for policy toward governments that in its view did not comprehend the consequences of their own actions. By that time only Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, and Swaziland maintained ties with Israel.

March 1972–September 1973

The Turn of the Large African States

The Foreign Ministry viewed the break with Uganda as an opportunity to reassess Israel's strategy in Africa. Israeli diplomats urged Mordechai Gazit, director-general of the Foreign Ministry, to exploit the failure in Uganda to restore to that office greater control of activities on the continent and forestall a further deterioration of Israel's position there.¹² In April 1972 Zvi Tsur, a former Israel Defence Force (IDF) chief-of-staff whose position at the Defence Ministry included supervision of arms transfers and finances, agreed that the Foreign Ministry oversee military assistance to the African states.¹³

That inter-office accord notwithstanding, security affairs and weapons sales in Africa remained primarily within the domain of the Prime Minister's Office and Defence Ministry. It is therefore ironic that the June 1972 Assembly of Heads of State of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which adopted the toughest

¹¹ Geldenhuys, *Isolated States*, pp. 20–21.

¹² Dafni to Gazit, 4 April 1972, ISA 5298/6.

¹³ Amir to Gazit, 17 April 1972, ISA 5298/6.

resolution that that body had hitherto passed against Israel, did not urge an end to arms imports to Africa from Israel. Instead, the OAU exhorted 'all member-states of the United Nations to refrain from supplying Israel with weapons, military equipment or moral support likely to strengthen its military potential and perpetuate its occupation of Arab and African territories'. The Black African states had peace-making in mind and wished to induce Israel to accept the plan that Gunnar Jarring, the Swedish ambassador to the United Nations, proposed for resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Moreover, the call to halt the sale of arms to Israel did not amount to an African plan aimed at ostracism, as most of the African members of the OAU still rejected Arab pressure to sever ties with Israel.¹⁴

Nevertheless, by the end of 1972 several of the larger Black African states had begun to reassess their relations with Israel. A deterioration of ties at the bilateral level worried the Israelis more than resolutions passed by intergovernmental organisations, because they had neither the economic wherewithal nor diplomatic sway to prevent a decline in relations with those countries. The states of greatest concern to Israel were Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast (from 1986 officially Cote d'Ivoire), Nigeria, and Zaire. By mid-1973 the Foreign Ministry had concluded that it could maintain relations with all of the African states by providing aid at levels more modest than that previously extended. That change in policy notwithstanding, Israel's strategic interest in East Africa, noted above, dictated maintaining a high level of investment in Ethiopia. At the same time, the influence of the Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Zaire in West and Central Africa motivated Israel to continue to cultivate their leaders assiduously.¹⁵ Yet, a brief examination of Israel's relations with each of these states highlights three principal aspects of their changing dispositions.

Thus, first, the OAU passed increasingly anti-Israel resolutions and created growing peer pressure in Africa with regard to the Middle East, but before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur these declarations induced few Black African states to sever ties. Second, the African states did not coordinate their policies with the intention of imposing isolation. Third, the reasons for the shift in policies toward Israel among the African states were in a number of cases of discrete origins.

Thus, Ethiopia regarded the deterioration in its own strategic circumstances as reason to reconsider its ties with Israel despite a close defence connection in place since the late 1950s. Israel sold Ethiopia few arms but trained the Imperial Ethiopian Army, security services, and Eritrean Emergency Police.¹⁶ Israeli assistance notwithstanding, by early 1973 Ethiopia attempted to ease its security troubles by conciliating the Arab states,¹⁷ which on the basis of four strategic issues brought pressure to bear on Addis Ababa.

First, in March 1973 the conference of Muslim states decided to step up assistance to the Eritrean Liberation Front. Second, the Arab states accused Ethiopia of leasing islands to Israel in the Red Sea.¹⁸ Third, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and several radical Black African states supported Somalia's demands upon Ethiopia, thus adding a territorial dimension to the pressure on Addis Ababa.¹⁹ Fourth,

¹⁴ C.O.C. Amate, *Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 366–367.

¹⁵ *Los Angeles Times* (1 July 1973).

¹⁶ 'Africa: Israeli Military Aid', 30 January 1970, United States National Archives (henceforth USNA) Record Group (RG) 59, Subject Numeric File (SNF) DEF 19 Israel-Africa.

¹⁷ Africa Division 'A' to Embassy in Addis Ababa, 29 April 1973, ISA 5319/11.

¹⁸ 'Ethiopia', 25 September 1973, ISA 8747/7.

¹⁹ Mossad to Foreign Ministry, 11 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

Muammar Qadhafi, president of Libya, lobbied the May 1973 assembly of OAU heads of state to convene the November 1973 session in Cairo instead of Addis Ababa and threatened Ethiopia with a jihad (holy war).²⁰ The Libyan leader failed to move the venue of the November session, but the attempt disturbed the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, for whom hosting the OAU was personally very important.²¹ These pressures had by early 1973 brought Ethiopia to view association with Israel with less enthusiasm than that which had in the 1960s marked the relationship. Haile Selassie told the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* that his country had placed at Israel's disposal no military facilities and would not do so in the future.²² The Ethiopian government asked Abba Eban, who had since February 1973 planned a trip to Addis Ababa, to postpone his visit.²³ It kept the Israeli foreign minister literally at a distance, and Eban made no call at Addis Ababa.

A growing chill in Ethiopia's relations with the United States also affected its view of Israel. In mid-May 1973 Haile Selassie visited the United States, warned of Soviet backing of Somalia, but failed to convince the Nixon administration to increase its military assistance to Ethiopia.²⁴ The government in Addis Ababa was mainly concerned to ensure that the radical Arab and African states did not succeed in isolating Ethiopia from the rest of Africa.²⁵ Nevertheless, the emperor's unsuccessful trip to Washington lent impetus to the rise in his government of a faction that adopted an 'Africanist-Arab' orientation in foreign policy, among the objectives of which was a downgrading of relations with Israel. According to the Mossad, by mid-1973 Ethiopia's prime minister, Aklilu Habte-Wold, had added his influence to growing pressure on Haile Selassie to terminate his country's defence ties with Israel.²⁶ On 5 June 1973 Youdith Imre, Ethiopia's deputy foreign minister, assured Hanan Aynor, Israel's ambassador there, that Haile Selassie was determined not to change his country's 'historic' relationship with Israel. Two days later Aynor met with the emperor, cabling the Foreign Ministry that 'during the next year, Ethiopia does not intend to change for the worse its approach toward us. With regard to the long term, it is difficult to tell'.²⁷

Haile Selassie had hoped that Israel would prevail upon the United States to supply arms that he himself had failed to obtain in Washington. He complained to the Israelis that the value of their contribution to Ethiopia's defence had diminished greatly in the face of growing threats to its security, claiming that this obligated them to lobby for him in Washington.²⁸ In mid-June 1973 Eban instructed Israel's ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, to approach the administration with regard to Ethiopia's arms requests, telling him to 'operate with the sense that Israel's principal ties in Africa depend in no small measure on the assumption of Israeli influence in Washington'.²⁹ Yaacov Shimoni, deputy director-general of the Foreign Ministry, urged upon Eban continued aid to Addis Ababa in order to prevent a rupture in ties that could lead to a chain reaction across Africa.³⁰ Eban instructed

²⁰ Arye Oded, *Africa and the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987), p. 5.

²¹ Embassy at Addis Ababa to Foreign Ministry, 4 June 1973, ISA 5319/3.

²² 'Ethiopia-Israel-Arabs', 2 May 1973, ISA 5318/16.

²³ Embassy at Addis Ababa to Foreign Ministry, 5 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

²⁴ D.H. Shinn, 'Themes in US-Ethiopian Relations', lecture at Howard University, Washington, DC, 26 March 2004.

²⁵ Embassy at Addis Ababa to Africa Division A, 19 July 1973, ISA 5318/17.

²⁶ Mossad to Foreign Ministry, 11 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

²⁷ Aynor to Shimoni, 7 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

²⁸ Bar-On to Foreign Ministry, 27 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

²⁹ Eban to Dinitz, 13 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

³⁰ Shimoni to Eban, 19 June 1973, ISA 5318/16.

Aynor to tell the Ethiopian government that Israel's own defence burden notwithstanding, it was trying to 'scrape together' one or two million dollars in military assistance to Addis Ababa.³¹ Yet, Israel was unable to bring the United States to increase its military support to Ethiopia. Apparent US indifference, growing external pressures, and the emperor's weakness convinced Ethiopia that whatever assistance Israel could still offer was no longer worth the political price.

The change in the Ivory Coast's attitude was largely at the whim of its president, Felix Houphouët-Boigny. By the early 1970s Houphouët-Boigny's influence in Africa had diminished, but he still had considerable stature and Israel wished to retain his good will.³² Houphouët-Boigny ascribed to himself the role of Israel's counsellor, repeatedly assuring the Israelis that he was their best friend in Africa and making clear that he expected them to heed his advice on African affairs. Moreover, he considered himself a leading candidate to mediate between Israel and Egypt, having participated in the OAU's 1971 Middle East peace initiative.³³

In late January 1973 Golda Meir tried to enlist Houphouët-Boigny's help in halting the African 'tilt' toward the Arab side in the Middle East conflict.³⁴ Nevertheless, on 28 May 1973 the OAU assembly of heads of state and government adopted a tough resolution declaring that '... Israel ... constitutes a threat to the security of the continent'. Houphouët-Boigny claimed that he had personally forestalled a call to sever ties with Israel.³⁵ The Foreign Ministry was sceptical of the credit that Houphouët-Boigny claimed. According to Tamar Golan, an Israeli journalist and expert in African affairs to whose reports the Foreign Ministry paid close attention, Houphouët-Boigny had become enamoured of Anwar Sadat, the president of Egypt, whom he had met at the May 1973 OAU assembly.³⁶

On 13 July 1973 Shimoni met with Houphouët-Boigny, who complained that the Arabs had 'cheated' him, pushing through a resolution much more severe than he had expected. At the same time, the president warned Shimoni that Arab influence in Africa had risen precipitously. The Arab states, he pointed out, were not merely 'friends' that the Black African states could ignore. The Arabs of Africa were 'brothers', he said, and the rest of the Arabs were the 'brothers of brothers'.³⁷ Hanan Aynor noted that the Ivoirian leader wished to curry favour with the presidents of Egypt and Algeria while at the same time presenting himself as Israel's advocate. He was, noted Aynor acerbically, 'janus-faced'.³⁸

Israel's relations with Nigeria were of a different nature. A great ambivalence had marked Israel's relationship with the Federal Republic of Nigeria since the British colony's independence in 1960. Israel established diplomatic relations with Nigeria despite the opposition of the country's predominantly Muslim Northern Region. The Foreign Ministry regarded the pro-Arab sentiment of Nigeria's large Muslim population (about 45 percent of a population of approximately 55 million) and the presence in Lagos of 10 Arab embassies that applied constant pressure

³¹ Aynor to Avriel, 13 July 1973, ISA 5318/17.

³² Ali Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependence and Change* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 62–64.

³³ Shalev to Ben-Tsur, 15 April 1973, ISA 5345/18.

³⁴ Shimoni's account of his 13 July 1973 meeting with Houphouët-Boigny, ISA 5345/22.

³⁵ Embassy at Abidjan to Foreign Ministry, 31 May 1973, ISA 5345/18.

³⁶ Golan's report on the Ivory Coast, 4 July 1973, ISA 5345/22.

³⁷ Alon to Shimoni, 16 July 1973, ISA 5345/22.

³⁸ Embassy at Addis Ababa to Embassy at Abidjan, 11 July 1973, ISA 5345/22.

to the government as 'chronic' problems in relations with that country.³⁹ In fact, Muslim resistance made the Nigerian government reticent to assign an ambassador to Israel, creating an anomaly that remained a feature of the relationship until the 1973 break in ties. The January 1966 coup in Nigeria heightened the Foreign Ministry's scepticism regarding military assistance to that country.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, at the behest of the Defence Ministry, Israel continued to sell Nigeria military equipment. Thus in 1968, during the Nigerian civil war, Israel sold the federal government in Lagos \$500,000 worth of arms.⁴¹ In that manner and notwithstanding its sympathy for Biafra, Israel maintained correct relations with Yakubu Gowon, who as a lieutenant colonel rose to power in the July 1966 counter-coup.

In early 1973 Gowon resisted Arab pressure on Nigeria to terminate its relations with Israel even after Chad, Mali and Niger, predominantly Muslim states in West Africa, had taken that step. Yet, the Nigerian president chaired the May 1973 OAU assembly and was to remain in that position for the next year. Israel viewed with concern his assumption of responsibility for the agenda of an organization that related to it in such negative terms. Put simply, Gowon was, from mid-1973, both president of the country with the largest Muslim population in Black Africa and the representative of Arab African OAU members hostile to the Jewish state. These circumstances heightened the ambivalence inherent in the Israeli–Nigerian relationship.⁴² At the end of the May 1973 OAU assembly Gowon warned that he would sever relations were Israel to continue to ignore OAU resolutions.⁴³ At the same time Okoi Arikpo, Nigeria's foreign minister, assured Israel that his government would allow no organization to dictate to it such a move. From that point until the time it severed relations, Nigeria treated Israel to a stream of contradictory messages that included threats to break ties and promises to the contrary. The warnings reflected both growing Muslim domestic pressure and Gowon's desire to lead the OAU toward a consensus on foreign affairs. The reassurances were those of high-ranking Nigerian officials, among them Arikpo, who remained loyal to the relationship with Israel and defiant in the face of what they perceived as Arab attempts to force their country's hand in foreign policy.⁴⁴

By mid-1973 Mobutu Sese Seko (until 1971 Joseph Mobutu), president of Zaire (until 1971 Congo), had placed in uncertain circumstances Israel's relationship with his country, too. Israel had in 1964 established an arms relationship with the Congo, transferring to it 10 old but operable M-4 Sherman tanks.⁴⁵ Yet, by 1965 both the Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry viewed as 'irresponsible' Mobutu's approach to military affairs. The Foreign Ministry wished to leave in place there only civilian aid and commercial ventures.⁴⁶ The Defence Ministry opposed that policy, warning that a retreat from agreement to train Mobutu's army would jeopardise Israel's foothold in Central Africa.⁴⁷ Israel continued its military assistance to the Congo.

³⁹ Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 27 December 1972, ISA 5363/27.

⁴⁰ Sofer to Shek, 11 February 1966, ISA 3993/17.

⁴¹ Embassy at Tel-Aviv to Department of State, 11 April 1970, USNA, RG59, SNF, DEF 19, Israel-Africa.

⁴² Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 5 June 1973, ISA 5363/28.

⁴³ *Maariv* (31 May 1973).

⁴⁴ Foreign Ministry to Embassy at Lagos, 30, 31 May 1973, 5363/28; Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 10 September 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁴⁵ *The Arms Trade Registers*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), p. 91.

⁴⁶ Leshem to Avriel, 31 December 1964, ISA 1360/4.

⁴⁷ Embassy at Leopoldville to Foreign Ministry, 29 January 1965, ISA 7230/16/A.

In November 1965 Mobutu carried out a military coup, following which he placed an even heavier emphasis on the military aspects of his country's relations with Israel. By 1966 the activities of Israel's 15-man military mission in Leopoldville (in 1966 renamed Kinshasa) overshadowed the role of the smaller embassy staff. By the end of 1967 Israel had trained nearly all of the Congo's senior officers, three paratroop battalions, and the Congo's police force. In 1968 Israel sold \$1.7 million worth of arms to the Congo, making that country one of its principal defence clients on the African continent.⁴⁸ In contrast, in 1965 Egypt's war in Yemen brought Cairo to cease both training of and arms shipments to Congolese rebels fighting against the pro-Western Leopoldville regime.⁴⁹

At the same time Mobutu made no move to replace his government's temporary appointee in Israel with a full-time ambassador.⁵⁰ In fact, Israel's principal reward for its military involvement in the Congo was that state's decision following the 1967 war not to sever relations, and the president made clear to Israel that its military assistance, however valuable, obligated his country to little diplomatic consideration. Yet Mobutu surprised the Israelis when, on the eve of the May 1973 OAU assembly, he abruptly informed them that he intended to terminate defence ties, claiming that his army had reached the 'desired level of competence'. What brought him to this sudden and (in Israeli eyes) rash decision?

According to the Foreign Ministry, Zaire's concern for its image and desire for greater sway in Africa explained both its turn against Israel and the limits that it had until October 1973 placed upon the growing rift. Zaire wished to be in the 'vanguard' of the OAU's growing accord regarding the Middle East, and Mobutu ascribed to himself a leading role on the continent. The 48-year-old Zairian president viewed as his principal competitor for that leadership not the aging Houphouët-Boigny (68 years old in 1973) but the dynamic Qadhafi, in 1973 14 years his junior. For that reason the government of Zaire 'outdid itself' in its condemnation of Israel's February 1973 downing of a Libyan civilian jet that had strayed over the Sinai peninsula. At that time Mobutu told Israel that he would accord it no more open support but promised not to sever ties. Yet by mid-1973 increasingly conflicting factors guided him with regard to the Middle East and relations with Israel.

Thus, on one hand, Zaire's image as a country closely associated with Israel was a growing obstacle to his ambitions in Africa. For that reason, the Zairian government cancelled the visit that Abba Eban was in June 1973 to have made to Kinshasa, claiming that to host the Israeli foreign minister so soon after the May OAU resolution would have been 'an embarrassment'. On the other hand, Mobutu's resentment of Qadhafi balanced his turn against Israel. Mobutu would not allow the Libyan leader both to determine the OAU's Middle East position and dictate Zaire's policy regarding Israel. He opposed the Libyan-sponsored attempt at the OAU to impose upon all African states a break in ties with Israel and exploit compliance as the criterion for good standing in that organization.⁵¹ In that manner, Zaire was by 1973 among the African states that publicly chastised Israel,

⁴⁸ Embassy at Tel-Aviv to Department of State, 11 April 1970, USNA, RG59, SNF, DEF 19, Israel-Africa.

⁴⁹ Tareq Y. Ismael, *The UAR in Africa: Egypt's Policy Under Nasser* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 225.

⁵⁰ Africa Division to Embassy at Kinshasa, 16 November 1966, ISA 6624/4.

⁵¹ 'Zaire-Israel Relations', Embassy at Kinshasa to Director-General, 18 June 1973, ISA 5343/6.

downgraded relations with it, but (until October 1973) resisted the Arab call to turn opprobrium into isolation of the Jewish state.

The changing disposition of almost all of the African states brought Israel in May 1973 to conduct a comprehensive reevaluation of its own policy. The Foreign Ministry had for several months reconsidered the practicality of assistance to and full diplomatic relations with more than 25 African states. On 20 August 1973 that office convened a meeting in Jerusalem to which it summoned all of its ambassadors to Africa, officials of the Ministries of Agriculture and Finance, and representatives of the IDF and Mossad. Eban presented the three alternatives among which Israel could choose. The first was total disengagement from Africa, which he rejected. The second alternative was that of a concentration upon only seven or eight African countries. Yet that too was unacceptable, for as Eban pointed out, Israel's departure from all or part of Africa was precisely what the Arab states wished to achieve. Israel's ties with every African state were a diplomatic and strategic asset, and for that reason, said the foreign minister, Israel would pursue a third alternative: continued relations with every state in which it had established a presence.⁵²

The Algiers Conference, September 1973

Three weeks after the meeting at the Foreign Ministry, the 5–9 September 1973 conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at Algiers adopted the most anti-Israeli resolution in its history. The participants reaffirmed 'the legitimacy of the struggle of the Palestinian people against colonialism, Zionism and racism', expressed deep concern at 'Israel's policy of aggression and expansion', demanded that all states forbid emigration to 'Palestine', and requested that member-countries boycott Israel 'diplomatically, economically, militarily and culturally'.⁵³ The Non-Aligned Movement could hardly have made more clear its call to isolate Israel, and among the 34 Black African states subscribing to that resolution were all of those with which Israel had relations. Why did those states agree to such language, how committed were they to its implementation, and in what manner did Israel prepare to deal with this development?

First, by the time of the Algiers conference, oil-rich Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and especially Libya had pledged extensive aid to the Black African states. During the 1960s Arab assistance to Black Africa had been limited almost entirely to that of Egypt, which from 1961 to 1967 had loaned four of those governments \$65 million.⁵⁴ In comparison, from 1958 to 1966, Israel (despite its own financial constraints) loaned 10 African states a total of \$199 million.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the desire of the Arab states to wean the Black African countries from relations with Israel brought the wealthier among them to pledge lavish assistance, and the poorer states on the continent regarded such promises as a considerable inducement. Yet we will see, too, that in October 1973 these weaker African

⁵² 'Convening of Israel's Ambassadors to Africa', 29 August 1973, ISA 5310/9.

⁵³ Ron Kochan, 'Israel in Third World Forums', in Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson (eds) *Israel in the Third World* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1976); Victor T. Le Vine and Timothy W. Luke, *The Arab-African Connection: Political and Economic Realities* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), p.7.

⁵⁴ Ismael, *U.A.R. in Africa*, pp. 159, 251–258.

⁵⁵ Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, p. 22.

countries viewed the Arab-initiated rise in world oil prices as a grave threat to their economies.

Second, the Algiers references to the Palestinians found the Black African states, which were highly sensitive to issues such as borders and refugees, receptive to a call to ease the plight of those people. Thus, the call for justice for the Palestinians accorded with the moral underpinnings of their world view. Third, the venue of an Arab capital made unlikely an anodyne statement, and Israel's detractors had the benefit of the incremental effect of recent resolutions at the OAU and UN. Several African states had at the May 1973 OAU assembly objected to an extreme approach to the Middle East dispute and wished such a stance no more at Algiers. Yet, the desire of the Black African states for harmony, which their own fear of isolation in great part motivated, made particularly appealing to them the 'unique form of administrative style' of which the NAM boasted. The African states favoured 'mutual accommodation on the basis of which agreement can emerge by a sincere process of adjustment among member nations in the true spirit of Non-Alignment'. Perhaps they felt that the NAM charter's confusing language removed the onus of supporting a significant step toward the ostracism of another state, instead hiding behind the phrase 'consensus, while signifying substantial agreement, does not require implying unanimity'.⁵⁶ In that manner, the delegates to the Algiers conference agreed to a 'common plan of action all over the world in the political and military fields', thus enabling the Arab states to incorporate their agenda in a broader framework of NAM policy to which the Black African states, too, were party.⁵⁷

Following the Algiers conference the Foreign Ministry braced for a rupture of ties by a number of states.⁵⁸ In truth, even after Algiers, the African states were slow to act upon commitments they had assumed. Nearly all of them either attempted to 'reform' Israel through admonitions that it relinquish the territories or did nothing at all. Thus, on 9 September 1973 Gowon warned that Nigeria would reconsider diplomatic relations were Israel to continue to be 'arrogant and defy world opinion'.⁵⁹ The Foreign Ministry urged Meir to write a letter of clarification to Lagos in order to mollify the Nigerian leader. She declined to do so and was (temporarily) vindicated, because Nigeria made no move to sever ties.⁶⁰

On 18 September 1973 the 28th session of the UN General Assembly convened in New York, affording the Arab states another opportunity to hector the African countries with regard to Israel. On the same day the foreign minister of Rwanda summoned the Israeli ambassador at Kigali and tersely demanded that he explain what Israel had in the past 10 years contributed to his country's welfare. Nevertheless, Rwanda effected no change in its relationship with Israel. Dahomey (Benin in 1975) merely asked Israel for a 'gesture' in the form of a declaration regarding the territories that would avert Arab pressure on Cotonou.⁶¹ Houphouët-Boigny, ever eager to offer advice, ventured that while the 'tone' in Africa toward

⁵⁶ The Non-Aligned Movement: Background Information, at <http://www.nam.gov.za>.

⁵⁷ Susan Aurelia Gitelson, 'Israel's African Setback in Perspective' (Jerusalem: Leonard Davis Institute, 1974), p. 17.

⁵⁸ Report of the Foreign Ministry, 18 September 1973, ISA 5311/14.

⁵⁹ Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 10 September 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁶⁰ Shimoni to Eban, 12 September 1973, ISA 5363/25.

⁶¹ Embassy at Cotonou to Foreign Ministry, 18 September 1973, ISA 8747/3.

Israel had become more aggressive since Algiers, there were no diplomatic severings on the horizon.⁶²

On 21 September 1973 Togo informed Israel of its decision to break off relations, citing the Israeli refusal to withdraw immediately from the occupied territories. The timing coincided with the visit to Libya of Gnassingbe Eyadema, Togo's president. The Foreign Ministry appears not to have viewed this break, on the part of a small state with a regime for which Israel had little esteem, with great alarm.⁶³ Few other African states regarded the Algiers resolution as binding in an urgent manner, and no more severings immediately ensued.⁶⁴ Omar Bongo, president of Gabon, told the Israeli ambassador at Libreville that Libyan promises of aid in no way bound his government, though he added that 'Israel, with all of its Rothschilds, could afford to do more' for his country.⁶⁵

October 1973: Rupture

On 4 October 1973 Zaire announced the termination of relations with Israel, and there commenced the second period with which we are concerned. Mobutu cited as the reason for Kinshasa's move Israel's territorial expansion, 'declaring this from the largest Jewish city in the world [New York City]' while promising that 'Zaire will carry out the duties of African cooperation'.⁶⁶ Four factors made the Zairian break the principal turning point in Israel's position in Africa. First, Zaire was the most powerful state in Central Africa, and its decision was bound to influence smaller states in that subregion.⁶⁷ Second, Mobutu used his position in order to persuade other African states to follow his example. Third, Zaire had given no earlier indication of its intention to break ties, adding to its decision the element of surprise.⁶⁸ Fourth, Mobutu made the decision two days before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, thereby amplifying the effect of the Arab call to other Black African states to see in the war itself greater reason to abide by the resolutions to which they were party.

In truth, most of the other African states regarded gladly neither Zaire's move nor heightened Arab pressure. On 5 October Houphouët-Boigny told Ovadia Sofer, Israel's deputy chief-of-mission at the United Nations, that he regretted Mobutu's decision.⁶⁹ No love of Israel motivated Houphouët-Boigny, and his promise not to alter the Ivory Coast's policy was worthless. Nevertheless, Houphouët-Boigny took a dim view of Mobutu's decision because it contributed to a process that he could not control. Moreover, two days later Arikpo, the Nigerian foreign minister, complained to Eban that Mobutu's decision was the product of the Zairian leader's ambition and 'bad for Africa'.⁷⁰ Gowon and Arikpo wished not to allow the decisions of other governments to dictate Nigeria's policy.

⁶² Embassy at Geneva to Foreign Ministry, 16 September 1973, ISA 8747/2.

⁶³ Embassy at Lomé to Eban, 22 September 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁶⁴ Sofer to Shimoni, 16 October 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁶⁵ Embassy at Libreville to Foreign Ministry, 4 October 1973, ISA 8747/3.

⁶⁶ Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, p. 144.

⁶⁷ Gitelson, 'Israel's African Setback', p. 20.

⁶⁸ Sofer to Shimoni, 9 October 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁶⁹ Sofer to Foreign Ministry, 5 October 1973, ISA 8747/2; Africa Division 'B' to Embassy at Abidjan, 7 October 1973, ISA 8747/2.

⁷⁰ Foreign Ministry to Embassy in Lagos, 7 October 1973, ISA 8747/1.

On 6 October Dahomey informed Israel of its decision to sever diplomatic relations. Eban met at the United Nations with Michel Alladaye, Dahomey's foreign minister. Alladaye assured Eban that most of the African states had no wish to hurt Israel but explained that they were caught in a cycle of commitments to the Arab states from which they could not extricate themselves. The effect of the resolutions to which the African states had subscribed, he said, were cumulative. Three days later Rwanda, too, terminated its relations with Israel, and on 11 October Upper Volta (in 1984 renamed Burkina Faso) did the same. Joseph Conombo, Upper Volta's foreign minister, told Sofer that the pressure and 'humiliation' to which the Arab states had subjected him and the country's president, Sangoule Lamizana, had brought them to make a decision they found distasteful.⁷¹

On 15 October Cameroon broke off relations with Israel. Equatorial Guinea did so the next day. Yet, with the exception of Zaire, the seven states that had between 21 September and 14 October cut off ties with Israel were small (in terms of population) and uninfluential actors. Following those diplomatic ruptures, Israel focused mainly on maintaining relations with the larger and more powerful African states and was most concerned with the intentions of Nigeria and Ethiopia. On 9 October 1973 the Israeli ambassador at Lagos, Yissachar Ben Yaakov, cabled that the 'snowball' of diplomatic breaks would not affect Nigeria. Yet, three days later Gowon warned Meir that Israel's relations with his country hung in the balance. On 11 October the IDF had pushed the Syrian army across the 1967 cease-fire line on the Golan Heights, and Gowon was unhappy at the prospect that Israel was 'liable to capture Damascus tomorrow'.⁷² Ben Yaakov urged that Meir respond personally to Gowon. The breakthrough on the Syrian front, neighbouring Cameroon's severing of ties, and South Africa's expression of support for Israel, he noted, were all factors that put pressure on Nigeria.⁷³

On 15 October Meir wrote to Gowon, reminding him of her role in fostering ties with his country.⁷⁴ The prime minister's missive was one of several considerations in the Nigerian government's 18 October decision to refrain (at that point) from severing relations. Nigeria was determined not to allow the Arab states to dictate an agenda over which it would have little sway. Moreover, Gowon was loath to appear to be following the leads of Mobutu and Amin, the latter of whom he had on 17 October sharply rebuked for attempting to influence Nigerian decisions regarding Israel.⁷⁵

Nigeria's policy toward Israel had a great effect upon Ethiopia. Thus, on one hand, Gowon's stern warning to Israel brought Ethiopia to view as imminent a Nigerian announcement of a break in ties. On the other hand, the Nigerian decision to maintain ties even after 16 October, when Israeli forces had crossed the Suez Canal (thus actually entering Africa), stayed for a few more days Addis Ababa's powerful inclination to ease its own plight by severing those relations. Nevertheless, on 23 October Minasse Haile, the Ethiopian foreign minister, told Aynor that by cutting ties the emperor hoped to placate the Arab states and ensure that a militarily superior Somalia did not invade his country.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Sofer to Foreign Ministry, 8, 11 October 1973, ISA 8747/3.

⁷² Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 9, 12 October 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁷³ Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 14 October 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁷⁴ Sofer to Foreign Ministry, 16 October 1973, ISA 5363/30.

⁷⁵ Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 17 and 19 October 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁷⁶ Embassy at Addis Ababa to Foreign Ministry, 15, 16, 23 October 1973, ISA 5318/18.

Ethiopia was influenced, too, by the announcement on 17 October of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) of a 70-percent rise in the price of oil. The impact of that declaration on the Middle East policies of most of the Black African states was significant but should be placed between two divergent approaches. Thus, according to Mazrui, the suggestion that 'Africa broke off relations with Israel for the sake of cheaper oil from the Arabs ... distorts the sequence of events'. Mazrui asserts that by the time OPEC had dramatically raised the price of oil, much of Africa had already sided with the Arabs. Moreover, he claims, the energy crisis 'did not hit the world until about the last 10 weeks of 1973'.⁷⁷

Yet when OPEC issued its announcement, 16 Black African states still maintained relations with Israel. For that reason, Le Vine and Luke consider disingenuous an explanation that disregards completely the effect of the oil rate hike. They claim that 'the biggest immediate factor was without question the fear on the part of most Africans that they would face a complete cut-off of their petroleum supplies if they did not take immediate action to isolate Israel ...'.⁷⁸ In fact, among the Black African states, only Nigeria, a member of OPEC, had very significant reserves of crude oil. Within a week of the OPEC announcement five more states broke off ties with Israel; these were Tanzania (18 October), Madagascar (20 October), the Malagasy Republic (20 October), the Central African Republic (21 October), and Sierra Leone (22 October).

Fighting on the Egyptian front continued despite the ceasefire, and on 25 October the Nigerian government cited Israel's ceasefire violations as its reason for severing diplomatic relations.⁷⁹ On the same day Stephen Tolbert, Liberia's minister of finance, brother of and closest adviser to President William Tolbert, told Israel's ambassador at Monrovia, Amos Ganor, of his pessimism regarding the future of relations between the two countries. How, asked Tolbert, could a poor Liberia continue to conduct relations with Israel, when powerful Nigeria had already severed ties? Tolbert confided to Ganor fears that included a halt to Arab oil supplies, an attempt to assassinate both him and his brother, and Liberia's isolation should it flout the new 'rule' that African states sever relations with Israel. Ganor protested that as a sovereign state Liberia would only harm its reputation were it to submit to Arab pressure. He met the next day with William Tolbert, who told him that Liberia wished to maintain a 'balanced approach' and had decided to maintain ties with Israel. The president asked that Israel expedite the dispatch of a team to train his bodyguards, and Ganor urged the Foreign Ministry to send, too, a special envoy to help him persuade the Liberians to 'stand their ground'.⁸⁰

The Liberian government did not stand its ground. On 30 October Eban met at the United Nations with Charles Cecil Dennis, Liberia's foreign minister, who told him of the severe pressure that the Arab states were applying to the smaller African countries.⁸¹ On 2 November Liberia severed ties with Israel, citing Kenya's break the preceding day as the immediate impetus for its decision.⁸²

⁷⁷ Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, p. 144.

⁷⁸ Le Vine and Timothy W. Luke, *The Arab-African Connection*, pp. 14–16.

⁷⁹ Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, p. 49.

⁸⁰ Embassy at Monrovia to Foreign Ministry, 25 and 26 October 1973, ISA 5356/6.

⁸¹ Shek to Shimoni, 30 October 1973, ISA 5356/6.

⁸² Embassy at Monrovia to Foreign Ministry, 2 November 1973, ISA 5356/4.

Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, and Zambia had also taken that step, both bringing to a climax and illustrating the dynamic of 'galloping isolation'. By 3 November 1973 Israel's diplomatic sphere in Black Africa had shrunk to ties with six states, of which only the Ivory Coast was of significant size and influence. Houphouët-Boigny had told Nissim Yosha, Israel's ambassador at Abidjan, that he would do all possible to ensure that the Ivory Coast be the last of the countries on the continent to sever ties with Israel. But the president repeated the worn mantra about the untenable position of an African state that remained outside the framework of consensus,⁸³ and Yosha understood that he in fact intended to effect a diplomatic rupture. The ambassador cabled his superiors that in order to save face, Israel should propose a joint communiqué announcing a break in relations.⁸⁴

The Foreign Ministry hoped that the Ivory Coast would refrain from severing ties and rejected Yosha's recommendation,⁸⁵ but on 8 November the Ivoirian Foreign Ministry asked Israel to close its embassy in Abidjan. In fact, the Ivory Coast was not, as Houphouët-Boigny had said he intended, the last African state to sever relations with Israel. Botswana maintained ties until 13 November, and with its announcement of the end to bilateral relations, the momentum of this diplomatic concatenation had spent itself.

Three principal aspects of the policies of the African states bear recounting. First, most of the African states remained preoccupied with the ideal of unity, feared being isolated, and severed ties with Israel under that duress. Yet (second), some Africans were concerned that the turn against Israel would sow division among them. Thus, for example, the Kenyan newspaper *Sunday Nation* warned that 'for the Africans the danger is in the rupture that may occur in the OAU over the Middle East ... breaking relations with Israel only contributes to such a rupture'.⁸⁶ Third, the conservative regimes on the continent feared that Arab success in bringing about a 'wholesale' break with Israel would heighten both communist and radical Islamic penetration of Africa. Houphouët-Boigny told the US president, Richard Nixon, that 'the anarchy that the Arabs will introduce into Africa will benefit only the Chinese'.⁸⁷ The presidents of Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia feared that Islam constituted a danger to them and had during the weeks preceding their break with Israel consulted the Mossad regarding Libyan and Saudi Arabian activities on the continent.⁸⁸ Arikpo, the Nigerian foreign minister, regretted the severings because they obviated an African role in mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁸⁹

The OAU conference that met from 19 to 21 November in Addis Ababa explicitly called upon member states to isolate Israel.⁹⁰ Yet, many of the African states regarded with misgivings the step they had taken, viewed those circumstances as temporary, and wished to conduct bilateral relations with Israel the substance, if not the form of which, corresponded to those that preceded the rupture. Thus, on 11 October 1973 the foreign minister of Upper Volta, Joseph

⁸³ Embassy at Paris to Foreign Ministry, 26 October 1973, ISA 8747/2.

⁸⁴ Embassy at Abidjan to Foreign Ministry, 28 October 1973, ISA 8747/2.

⁸⁵ Summary of meeting, director-general and directors of Africa Divisions, 29 October 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁸⁶ *Sunday Nation* (27 October 1973).

⁸⁷ Kissinger to Nixon, 9 October 1973, Box 92, Nixon Presidential Materials, Memoranda to the President, President's Office Files, USNA.

⁸⁸ 'Zambia', report of the Foreign Ministry, 25 September 1973, ISA 8747/7.

⁸⁹ Embassy at Lagos to Foreign Ministry, 2 November 1973, ISA 8747/1.

⁹⁰ Peters, *Israel and Africa*, p. 38.

Conombo, whose government had the same day severed ties with Israel, offered Sofer profuse apologies and told him of its desire to resume ties 'as soon as the diplomatic climate permitted'.⁹¹ On 24 October the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry told the departing Israelis of its desire that they view the break in relations as a 'formal step only'.⁹² On 5 November 1973 Stephen Tolbert asked how Monrovia could, despite the break, maintain 'friendly and formal (sic) relations' with Israel.⁹³

The next day Ghana queried whether Israel would agree to ties 'just short' of diplomatic relations.⁹⁴ Houphouët-Boigny used his final meeting with the Israeli ambassador to ask that Israel continue its assistance to the Ivory Coast's (paramilitary) National Service project,⁹⁵ and Abidjan's ambassador to the United Nations told Sofer that Houphouët-Boigny did not want to 'harm relations with Israel'.⁹⁶ On 13 November the Zairian ambassador to the United Nations told Sofer that Mobutu was already looking for a way to resume ties, wishing to be the first to do so in order to 'play a role suited to his ambitions'.⁹⁷ The government of Kenya maintained contact with Israel through the Mossad, treating its agents there in a 'business as usual' manner.⁹⁸

Thus, the African states offered Israel platitudes and informal ties, but none of them moved to resume diplomatic relations. The Israelis viewed askance the 'para-diplomatic' arrangements that they proposed and disparaged African statecraft 'cooked up in Arab kitchens'.⁹⁹ Shimoni dismissed the Liberians' approach with the suggestion that someone explain to them the absurdity of the situation, asking acidly, 'If their interest in relations is so powerful, why did they sever them?'¹⁰⁰ He instructed Israel's representatives at the United Nations to 'acquaint the African envoys with the facts of diplomatic life'. There was no such thing, he said, as 'unofficial ties akin to formal relations'.¹⁰¹ In Israel's eyes, the African states simply failed to grasp the gravity of the step they had taken.

November 1973 to May 1974

The Reformulation of Israeli Policy

During the six months that followed the 'African break' the Foreign Ministry drafted several documents that formed the basis of a revised approach toward those states. In fact these measures did not amount to a coherent strategy, and there was in any case little that Israel could have done to alter the circumstances. A desire to punish the African states was not absent from Israeli policy. An immediate response was Israel's objection to the participation in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II in the Sinai Peninsula, established in October

⁹¹ Sofer to Foreign Ministry, 11 October 1973, ISA 8747/3.

⁹² Cables of Yaffe and Aynor to Foreign Ministry, 24 October 1973, ISA 5318/18.

⁹³ Shimoni to Embassy at Monrovia, 5 November 1973, ISA 5356/4.

⁹⁴ Sofer to Shimoni, 6 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁹⁵ Meeting at the Foreign Ministry, 12 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁹⁶ Sofer to Africa Division 'B' and UN Division, 28 November 1973, ISA 5345/19.

⁹⁷ Sofer to Foreign Ministry, 13 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

⁹⁸ Africa Division 'A' to Director-General, 12 December 1973, ISA 5384/27; Mossad to Foreign Ministry, 19 December 1973, ISA 5384/27.

⁹⁹ Sofer to Ruppin, 18 December 1973, ISA 5310/12.

¹⁰⁰ Shimoni to Embassy at Monrovia, 5 November 1973, ISA 5356/4.

¹⁰¹ Shimoni to Sofer, 13 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

1973) of African states that had severed ties with it.¹⁰² The Foreign Ministry also instructed its envoys both to exploit the Africans' fear that the break might harm their own interests and actively undermine their economies by 'discreetly' discouraging the development of, investment in, and tourism to those countries.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, settling the score with the African states did not amount to a policy, and the Foreign Ministry drew up an agenda for its approach to Africa that was comprised of three principal issues. These were the questions of continued assistance, diplomatic contact, and economic interaction. Israeli policy reflected a deeply ambivalent attitude toward those states. The Foreign Ministry reluctantly accepted the protestations of most African leaders and diplomats that no hostility had motivated them to sever relations. Yet this mitigated only slightly Israel's unwillingness to allow those countries, given the state of affairs that they had created, to enjoy the benefits of normal ties.

First, in mid-November 1973 the Foreign Ministry noted that 'upon the severance of relations all *Mashav* (Division of International Cooperation) experts are to be recalled'.¹⁰⁴ In fact, Israel terminated neither immediately nor completely that assistance. African trainees in Israel were permitted to complete their studies, Israel agreed to assist in the completion of the Ivory Coast's National Service project, the consulting firm *Agridev* (of the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture) continued to work in Liberia, and a few technical advisers remained in Kenya.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, in late 1973 the Foreign Ministry recalled almost all of those advisers and during the following months reassigned only a few personnel to Africa. Thus, in 1973 138 Israeli experts worked on long-term missions in Africa. In 1974 that number was 49, of which only 16 were in countries that had severed relations. In 1973 150 Israelis served on short-term missions to Africa, but in 1974 no Israelis worked on short-term projects in states that had broken off ties. *Mashav* had in 1973 hosted 340 Africans in Israel but in 1974 received only 88 trainees.¹⁰⁶

Second, by the end of November 1973 the Foreign Ministry dismissed completely the possibility that any of the African governments that had severed relations would seek to resume them.¹⁰⁷ After that point Israel regarded as useful only limited contact with the states that had ruptured ties. During the months that followed the severings, Israeli officials met discreetly with the leaders of the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, and Senegal.¹⁰⁸ In Eban's view, those meetings and contact with African envoys at the United Nations (to which many of the African foreign ministries posted some of their most senior diplomats), were sources of important intelligence regarding the activities of the Arab states.¹⁰⁹ Israel naturally took a great interest, too, in Black African expressions of unhappiness with 'unfulfilled Arab promises'. Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministry made clear that a resumption of diplomatic relations was not the purpose of those contacts.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² Tekoa to Foreign Ministry, 28 October 1973, ISA 5318/10.

¹⁰³ 'Proposals and Recommendations for Operations in Africa', 23 November 1973, ISA 5310/11.

¹⁰⁴ Meeting at the Foreign Ministry, 12 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

¹⁰⁵ Africa Division 'A' to Director-General, 20 December 1973, ISA 5384/20.

¹⁰⁶ Shimeon Amir, 'Challenge and Response: Israel's Development Cooperation, 1974–1975', in *Israel in the Third World*, p. 238. See table in Peters, *Israel and Africa*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁷ Rupin to Kidron, 30 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

¹⁰⁸ 'Israel-Africa', report of the Foreign Ministry, January 1974, ISA 8770/2.

¹⁰⁹ Eban to Kidron, 17 November 1973, ISA 5311/2.

¹¹⁰ Shimoni to Sofer, 10 May 1974, ISA 8770/2.

Third, in February 1974 the Foreign Ministry decided that the absence of diplomatic relations would not obviate continued trade with the African states.¹¹¹ In fact, economic ties became the dominant element in Israel's relations with the African states and in some cases the only one. Israel's exports to the Black African states increased from \$30.7 million in 1973 to \$41 million in 1974, and Israeli imports from those countries rose from \$29.1 million in 1973 to \$47.5 million the following year. By 1979 the value of Israeli exports to the Black African countries reached \$75.4 million.¹¹² Nevertheless, care should be taken to overstate neither Israel's achievement on that plane nor the importance for the African states of that trade. Israel's exports to Africa never constituted more than 4–5 percent of the total volume of Israeli sales abroad. Moreover, the value of Israeli exports to the Black African countries dropped from 18.3 percent of that of the Arab states in 1973 to 7.8 percent of Arab sales to those countries in 1974, reflecting the Arab export of oil to non-Arab African states. By 1979 the value of Israeli exports to the Black African countries was only 5 percent that of Arab sales (\$1.5 billion) there.¹¹³

Fourth, the increase in trade notwithstanding, the severing of ties by the countries in which Israelis had conducted business created great uncertainty and prevented the attainment of a higher volume of economic activity.¹¹⁴ Some researchers have emphasised the continuity in Israel's defence ties with African states, pointing to Kenyan assistance to Israel in the 1976 Entebbe (Uganda) operation, Israeli military assistance to Ethiopia (from 1974) under Mengistu Haile Mariam, and Israeli arms transactions elsewhere on the continent.¹¹⁵ In fact, Israel's arms sales in Africa remained limited, the Defence Ministry obtained none of the lucrative arms contracts to which it aspired, and the absence of diplomatic representation inhibited much of Israel's activity there.

Conclusion

The insouciance with which most of the African states treated resolutions inhibiting interaction with Israel and their disavowal of hostility toward the Jewish state suggest that their severing of ties had no real purpose. This study has demonstrated that in fact the yearning for unity, their own fear of isolation, the momentum of successive diplomatic breaks with Israel, and from mid-October 1973 the fear of Arab oil pressure placed a steadily increasing strain upon most of the African states. The small African countries felt most keenly the insecurity that these factors created, and they took great care to defy neither the African consensus nor the demands of the Arab states. At the same time, most of the African states shared a genuine desire to enforce the norms regarding both the status of refugees and the continued occupation of territory taken in war that they believed Israel had violated. For those states, organisations such as the NAM, OAU, and UN were important symbols of the international community and the

¹¹¹ Summary of a meeting at the Foreign Ministry, 20 February 1973, ISA 8747/4.

¹¹² Peters, *Israel and Africa*, pp. 69–70.

¹¹³ T.H. Kanaan, 'The Economic Dimension of Contemporary Afro-Arab Relations', in Khair El-Din Haseeb (ed.) *The Arabs and Africa* (Dover, New Hampshire, 1985), p. 409.

¹¹⁴ Embassy at Nairobi to Foreign Ministry, 5 November 1973, ISA 8747/8.

¹¹⁵ Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, pp. 73–77; Oded, *Africa and the Middle East Conflict*, pp. 168–172.

logical settings for the assignment of the opprobrium that in their view Israel deserved.

Harsh resolutions notwithstanding, the African states engaged in what Geldenhuys has termed 'policy-directed isolation', assailing neither Israel's right to exist nor its legitimacy. Put simply, the African states blamed Israel for what it had done but not for what it was. Nevertheless, the claim to which the African states clung, that they intended censure but not belligerence, was naïve at best, in some cases disingenuous, and glaringly inconsistent. Most of the African governments participated in enforced isolation while denying that that was their policy, disavowing aggression against Israel but subscribing to measures the effect of which was indirect violence.

Israel felt the consequences of the African states' decisions to sever ties in four principal areas. The first was the psychological and symbolic impact of the rupture in relations that 27 states effected in less than one year and 21 of them during a period of 40 days. In late October 1973 the normally reserved Shimon Peres instructed the ambassador at Abidjan to tell the Ivory Coast's president of Israel's 'great disappointment' at the behaviour of the African states during Israel's 'fateful hour'.¹¹⁶ The culmination of that impact in political terms was the vote that 19 Black African states cast in favour of the November 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution (3379) equating Zionism with racism. The African states at least demonstrated remarkable consistency at the United Nations, a large majority of them from 1972 voting against Israel on every resolution dealing with the Arab–Israeli dispute.

Second, the end to a diplomatic presence in almost every Black African state was a serious strategic setback for Israel that not all scholars who have dealt with the subject acknowledge. According to Decalo, Israel's setback in Africa was a salutary development. Thus, he writes that 'with Black Africa written off as a bad debt, Israel found itself freed of ... hitherto constraining obligations. Israel's strong links with the United States, for example, had been somewhat obscured in the 1960s by the rhetoric of solidarity with the Third World. Now the natural sympathies for the United States could again be given free rein. Military options *vis-à-vis* Arab neighbours ... shelved as potentially disruptive of Israel's standing in the Third World were now pursued without concern'.¹¹⁷

That is a view that does not accord with the documentary record. It is true that the end to a presence in Africa permitted Israel to focus greater attention upon other regions, such as Latin America, that it had largely neglected. Yet, the only benefit to Israel from the exit from Africa was the end to its association with a number of unenlightened regimes. The absence of embassies hampered Israel's ability both to gather intelligence and monitor at close range the activities of its rivals on the African continent. Files recently made accessible in Israel's archives reveal the concern of its policy-makers, following the diplomatic breaks, regarding those constraints. The release of documents from the period beginning with the mid-1970s will make possible a more complete assessment of the manner in which Israel coped with the limitations that the void on both the diplomatic and strategic planes created.

¹¹⁶ Foreign Ministry to Embassy at Abidjan, 23 October 1973, ISA 5345/19.

¹¹⁷ Decalo, *Israel and Africa*, p. 148.

Third, the urgency that the 1973 Yom Kippur war created forced Israel to deal with the actions of the African states in an atmosphere of crisis. The African governments did not aim to create discord among Israel's policy-makers and bureaucratic organisations, but that is often a consequence of the imposition of isolation and an aspect of the 'indirect violence' that Israel experienced. Who among Israel's decision-makers and which offices were to be held accountable for such a sudden and dramatic diplomatic setback?

In early November 1973 the Mossad reviewed the termination of the Israeli presence in Africa and placed heavy blame on the Foreign Ministry for (ostensibly) having refused military assistance to and intelligence-sharing with several African states.¹¹⁸ The Foreign Ministry protested that the Mossad had not consulted with its African experts before reaching its conclusions.¹¹⁹ Moshe Dayan, Israel's minister of defence, suggested that the Foreign Ministry had for years ignored signs that the Black African states had had 'a change of heart' with regard to Israel.¹²⁰ The Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported Meir's blunt criticism of Eban, whom she claimed had expressed unwarranted optimism regarding relations with the African states and was in great measure responsible for the rupture.¹²¹ Eban practically ignores these accusations, noting in his autobiography that the '... rupture in relations ... was not because of any failure in our diplomacy, but because, unlike Egypt, we were not members of the African "club"'.¹²²

In truth, Israel had the means to compete in Africa with neither the communist states nor the Arab oil producers. From 1959 to 1967, Soviet credits to Black African states reached \$617 million, and those that the Eastern European states extended totalled \$277 million. During the same period the People's Republic of China lent governments in the sub-Saharan region \$311 million.¹²³ From 1973 to 1981 the Arab oil-exporting states, mainly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya, extended the Black African countries assistance that reached \$1.67 billion.¹²⁴

A fourth consequence for Israel was the loss of hundreds of positions that its official envoys and ordinary citizens on technical missions had filled on the continent. This was the most prosaic aspect of the impact of the departure from Africa but nevertheless merits mention. At the end of 1973, the Foreign Ministry pondered the future assignments of scores of diplomats for whom it had lost, in unprecedented fashion, regular employment. Yehiel Ilsar, head of the Foreign Ministry's history department, urged that the returning diplomats be put to work on detailed research of the background of Israel's relations with every African state. Shimoni replied impatiently that the lack of historical perspective obviated any justification for the 300-page report that Ilsar proposed.¹²⁵

Finally, with a view toward future archival-based research, there is the question of the extent of Israel's isolation. In July 1976 Mauritius severed relations with Israel, leaving it with embassies in only three countries in Black Africa. Harkavy,

¹¹⁸ Amir to Shimoni, 'Mossad Review no. 21', 6 November 1973, ISA 5311/7.

¹¹⁹ Shimoni to Amir, 7 November 1973, ISA 5310/11.

¹²⁰ *Yediot Ahronot* (12 November 1973).

¹²¹ *Haaretz* (12 November 1973).

¹²² Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes* (New York: Putnam, 1992), p. 521.

¹²³ 'Communist States and Developing Countries' (Appendix A), in Warren Weinstein (ed.) *Chinese and Soviet Aid to Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1975), pp. 246–249.

¹²⁴ Kanaan, 'The Economic Dimension of Contemporary Afro-Arab Relations', p. 414.

¹²⁵ Shimoni to Ilsar, 22 November 1973, ISA 5311/7.

writing in 1977, ranked Israel's 'pariahhood' third behind that of Taiwan and South Africa.¹²⁶ Israel was estranged from nearly all of Africa, most of the Third World, and all of the communist states with the exception of Romania. Israeli diplomacy outside Africa survived the crisis of the Yom Kippur war intact, closing no legations in Europe, North America or Latin America. That notwithstanding, during and after the Yom Kippur war the Middle East policies of several Western European countries, foremost among them France and Britain, further heightened Israel's sense (if not the scope) of isolation.

By the early 1980s four factors brought several African states to reconsider relations with Israel. First, most of the African governments were disappointed with the level of Arab assistance to them. They had anticipated a two-tier oil pricing system in the framework of which the oil-rich Arab states would sell them petroleum at a discounted rate. Mazrui argues that that demand was unreasonable but explains the Africans' expectation that the Arabs extend such consideration as a *quid pro quo* for their Middle East policies.¹²⁷

Second, a number of African states continued to regard their break with Israel as a forfeiture of independence in foreign policy that they intended eventually to rectify. Third, for several African states initially and for nearly all of them eventually, the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement of 1979 constituted a turning point that justified a change in approach to the Middle East. Israel completed its withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, and even its final departure from that territory brought no immediate change in the posture of most of the African countries. Nevertheless, the Camp David Accords provided the African governments that in the following years resumed ties with Israel the principal justification for doing so. Moreover, a fourth factor for these African governments was heightened concern for the Palestinians that the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement had created and the desire to regain a measure of influence with regard to the Arab–Israeli conflict.¹²⁸

In 1982 Zaire (in 1997 renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo) resumed diplomatic relations with Israel. Liberia did so in 1983, the Ivory Coast in 1986, Kenya in 1988, Ethiopia in 1989, and Nigeria in 1992. The 1993 Oslo Accords, the Israeli–Jordanian peace treaty of 1994, and Israel's relations with post-apartheid South Africa brought nearly all of the Black African states to resume diplomatic relations with Israel.¹²⁹ Israel experienced one more break in ties by an African state: that was the case of Niger, which in November 1996 renewed relations with Israel but in April 2002 severed them again. That slight setback notwithstanding, by 2005 (and at present writing) Israel had diplomatic missions in 41 countries (including Egypt) on the African continent.

¹²⁶ Harkavy, 'Pariah State Syndrome', p. 634.

¹²⁷ Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, pp. 145–148.

¹²⁸ Arye Oded, 'Africa and Israel: African Attitudes Toward Resumption of Diplomatic Relations' (Jerusalem: The Leonard David Institute for International Relations, 1986), pp. 2–4, 20–21; Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, pp. 154–155.

¹²⁹ See an account of Israel's relations with the new government of South Africa and resumption of relations with Black African states in Alon Liel, *Black Justice: The South African Upheaval* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999).

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