

## Excerpted from *Israel: An Apartheid State?*

A primer by US Campaign Advisory Board member, Nancy Murray

C. What kind of connections had been forged between Israel and apartheid South Africa?

The parallels between policies in Israel and apartheid South Africa are hardly incidental. They grew out of a close connection which helped South Africa sustain its apartheid regime.

### 1. An Evolving Alliance

- Given South Africa's support for Nazi Germany, the alliance it formed with Israel soon after the state was founded is surprising. For this was no ordinary alliance. In his 1987 book *The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why*, Israeli Professor Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi described the intimate collaboration between Israel and apartheid South Africa as "a unique alliance...the most comprehensive and the most serious Israeli involvement anywhere in the world. Many countries conduct business with South Africa, and many countries support the survival of apartheid in various ways, but only Israel's support is so direct and unreserved. Only in Israel are the red carpets rolled out for the visits of South African leaders" – as it was in April 1976 for Prime Minister John Vorster, who had been imprisoned by the British for pro-Nazi activities which he never repudiated. Only Israel, wrote Beit-Hallahmi, offered South Africa assistance "with everything from public relations to military and counterinsurgency measures."
- South Africa and Israel were drawn together by their colonial outlook at a time when colonial empires in Africa and Asia were dissolving. They made common cause against "Soviet expansionism" in the 1950s and 60s, and against the potential for radicalism in the emerging nations of Africa and Asia.
- The relationship did not always proceed smoothly. In 1961 Israel hoped to improve its standing in Black Africa by joining the countries that censured South Africa at the United Nations. South African prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the main architect of apartheid, rebuked Israel with these words: "Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state" (*Rand Daily Mail*, November 23, 1961).
- The wars fought by Israel in 1967 and 1973 alienated Black Africa and healed the temporary rift with South Africa. In subsequent years, the alliance grew to seem both "natural" and expedient, a bonding of two "pariah" nations fighting for survival in an increasingly hostile world.

### 2. Personal Ties

- In 1968 the Israeli government established a tourist office in South Africa, and after that hundreds of thousands of Israelis and South Africans visited each others' countries. When tourism to South Africa from the rest of the world declined due to the international boycott, tourism from Israel grew year by year. Israelis were frequent visitors to Namibia (occupied by South Africa in defiance of a ruling by the International Court of Justice) and the Bantustans, where they vacationed, ran businesses and advised on security matters.
- There was a network of sister-city agreements between South African and Israeli towns. Bisho, the capital city of South Africa's notorious "homeland" Ciskei was paired with Ariel, the West Bank settlement which early in 1989 ordered its Palestinian labor force to wear badges proclaiming them to be "foreign workers. Sister-city relationships were also formed between Tel-Aviv and Johannesburg, Haifa and Cape Town, Eilat and Durban, and Askelon and Port Elizabeth.
- More Israelis emigrated to South Africa than to any other country except the US.

### 3. Economic Ties

- In the aftermath of the 1967 war, an Israeli-South Africa Friendship League was set up in Israel to promote trade, which nearly doubled in the aftermath of the 1973 Israeli-Arab war, and then expanded significantly after Prime Minister Vorster's 1976 visit.
- South Africans held an estimated 35 percent of all non-US investment in the Israeli economy, according to the *South African Financial Mail* for May 11, 1984.
- Israel played a key role in helping South Africa evade sanctions. Under the guise of a web of joint

ventures, dummy companies and middlemen, Israel supplied South Africa with needed technology, and also turned South African materials into finished products that were exported to Africa, the US and Europe bearing a "Made in Israel" label.

#### 4. The Military Connection

- Professor Beit-Hallahmi termed Israel "South Africa's closest military ally and its source of inspiration and technology." About 95 percent of the equipment for South Africa's airforce and 100 percent of its naval equipment originated in Israel. South African soldiers carried weapons made in Israel and even wore Israeli-made helmets.
- Rafael Medoff and Mordechai Haller disputed Israel's claim that it adhered to the 1977 UN mandatory arms embargo, stating that Israel had supplied South Africa with "rifles, mortars, radar stations, electronic surveillance equipment, patrolboats, gunboats, pilotless drone scouts, missiles, anti-terrorist alarm systems, and night-vision devices" (The National Review, April 15, 1988).
- Jane Hunter wrote that South Africa financed Israeli arms projects and bought the right to produce arms under Israeli license (Israeli Foreign Policy: South Africa and Central America, 1987).
- Israel has also given South Africa's security forces advanced lessons in the control of "subversion," based on its West Bank/Gaza model. It equipped South Africa's borders with electronic fencing, night sights, microwave detection systems and anti-personnel mines, and taught it to deal with hostile neighboring states through "pre-emptive" or "retaliatory" strikes.
- Intelligence agencies of both countries shared information and conducted joint operations. South African officers attended Israeli military schools, and Israelis served alongside them in South Africa and Namibia.
- In Beit-Hallahmi's view, the intimate collaboration in "security" measures made sense since "the two countries predicate their survival on the achievement of complete military self-sufficiency, and on putting the need for survival above any other consideration."

#### 5. Nuclear Collaboration

- Both countries saw the possession of nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantee of their existence. In 1962 Israel received ten tons of uranium from South Africa for use in its Dimona nuclear reactor. By the 1970s, Israel and South Africa were collaborating in the development of their nuclear programs.
- US intelligence reported evidence of a joint Israel-South Africa nuclear test taking place on September 22, 1979. But it refused to investigate the nuclear relationship, despite evidence smuggled out in 1986 by Israeli technician Mordechai Vanunu that South Africans regularly worked at Dimona.
- On October 25-27, 1989 NBC Nightly News reported that Israel and South Africa had tested a long-range nuclear-tipped missile in July. This was a blatant violation of the US mandatory arms embargo on South Africa and also of US imposed sanctions. For three nights viewers saw evidence of the close military relationship between the two countries – including the fact that Israel had "transferred much of the technology for its cancelled Lavi fighter bomber to South Africa. The development of the Lavi was paid for largely by the US Congress with one-and-a-half billion dollars in aid to Israel...If Washington makes its evidence public, Israel would be in jeopardy of losing billions of dollars in US aid. So, the stakes are very high."
- The US Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 had required the President to report to Congress on any violations of the UN arms embargo of South Africa with a view to terminating US military assistance to those countries." In March 1987, Israel forestalled any potential cut in aid by announcing it would "cut back" its military ties with South Africa.
- Since 1985 Foreign Aid Authorization bills have stipulated that the US provide neither economic nor military assistance to countries involved in nuclear proliferation. In that year Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) withdrew a proposed amendment barring assistance from any country having a nuclear relationship with South Africa after he was promised a hearing on the matter – which was never held. The "peace movement" steered clear of the issue.