

Deteriorating Israeli position in Africa

by Emile Touma

After attending the meeting of the Socialist International in Paris, and visiting the Pope and Italian leaders in Rome, the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir hopped to a rustic Geneva suburb and met Ivory Coast President Felix Houphouet Boigny for a marathon meeting of three and a half hours.

Writing on the following day (18.1.73) the Jerusalem Post remarked: "The meeting appears to mark an offensive by Israel to shore up its diminishing popularity among the African states, five of which broke off diplomatic relations with Jerusalem recently."

Earlier the Israeli press on 8.1.73 revealed that the cabinet will hold a special session to discuss "the position of Israel in Africa."

This expressed the anxiety of the Israeli ruling circles over their deteriorating position in the young continent.

Within the first week of the New Year 1973, Congo (Brazzaville), Niger and Mali broke their diplomatic relations with Israel and joined Chad which did so at the end of November and Uganda which took the initiative in March of the same year.

At first the Israeli official spokesmen tried to gloat over Uganda's step by harsh and critical comments on General Amin's regime, and explained off his action by Libya's credits and Israel's refusal to supply him with Phantoms to wage war. But the chain reaction in Africa forced the media to start a general reappraisal of Israel's position in Africa.

Public opinion in Israel found it difficult to understand the factors at play behind this development; especially when Israeli Foreign Office officials declared that there was no reason or explanation in the

bilateral relations between Jerusalem and Brazzaville which could account for the move of the Congo Government. (The Press, 1.1.73.)

They repeated this in a press briefing on 4.1.73 saying that there had been nothing in the relations between Israel and Niger to justify the latter's break of diplomatic relations.

Under the circumstances the Jerusalem Post of 7.1.73 could be excused when it wrote editorially that it is possible to understand Uganda's step but one cannot find reasons for the action of the others and "when no reason for the break is revealed that the public feels at a loss."

But since then there has been an avalanche of explanations. Besides Libya's credits, the pressure of the Moslem populations, the Arab diplomatic offensive and Israeli shortcomings the London Times 17.1.73 asserted: that Israelis suspect that French diplomacy is behind these developments, since the last four defections have all been from French speaking Africa.

Naturally, after the early repercussions of the "African shock" faded away, Israeli officials tried to belittle the significance of five countries in Africa and emphasized that Israel's original success in establishing such wide relations with so many African countries (still standing at 27) was a great achievement. (In a symposium on the subject of Africa held by "Davar" with ex-Ambassador U. Lohrani, military commentator H. Herzog and D. Golan Manager First International Bank of Israel, 19.1.)

However, there are those who conceive the African development in the general context of Israel's international position and therefore consider it grave and dangerous. It emphasizes the fact that Israel has diplomatic relations with half the states in the world only. (Ibid).

ISRAEL'S OBJECTIVES IN AFRICA

It is possible to understand the implication and significance of this latest turn of events if one remembers the objectives and hopes of the Israeli ruling circles and "their principles" at the beginning of their "African adventure"!

Netanel Lorch, an earlier head of the African desk at the Israeli

Foreign Office explained about a decade ago why Africa was important to Israel by stressing that it has a third of the United Nations seats and can block a resolution. He added that Israel needs trade markets and raw material (diamonds and wood) and therefore Africa is important. (The journal of Educational Sociology N.Y. vol. 36, April 1963, No. 8, p.397.)

Others have repeated this theme in this way or the other and Noam Shepherd of the New Statesman wrote (August 1964) that in the new post-colonial world Israel "could not afford to number her friends among the Western powers alone."

The Arab Israeli conflict was a decisive factor in the Israeli African policy, and the campaign of the Israeli ruling circles to establish many-sided relations with the emerging independent African states was an attempt to "leap frog" over the Arab blockade.

However, there were other motivations in the policy of the Israeli ruling circles.

Michael Brecher in his book "The New States in Asia" writes when noting other unstated Israeli objectives:

"One is the desire to serve as a bridge between the former colonial powers of the West and former dependent territories. The possession of Western skills, without the stigma of colonialism fits Israel for a big role of channelling aid from the West which might be suspected if granted directly".

In other words, Israel was to act as agent for the neocolonialist principals sitting in Washington, London, Paris and Bonn.

In order to carry out this task the Israeli ruling circles had to become the spearhead of anti-Sovietism and anti-communism. Implying these efforts, Dr R. Elston, one time correspondent of "Times" in Israel, wrote:

"The new, unstable sovereign states can become entangled in 'strings'. One string leads to another and in time become yet another rope for the big powers to play at tug of war in which all too often the communist powers win. . . and that oddly enough is where Israel comes". ("Time and Tide", 3.9.1960).

The Israel Economist acknowledged this idea when commenting on Israeli policy in Africa and its success noted that "the Western powers are quite naturally anxious to ensure that the whole African continent does not swing sharply leftward into the communist camp." (July 1962, p. 120).

It was no accident that Israeli emissaries in Africa and their counterparts who lectured to Africans in Israel concentrated on dispelling Soviet and communist "illusions" (sic) and disproving the validity of the socialist path (!) and ascertaining that Israel is the best example to follow because it faces the same problems of all developing nations!

It is well known that Israeli officials laid the ground for the future relations with many African countries before their emergence as independent states. This was done under the patronage, and with the assistance, of the imperialist powers.

Israeli great success in such countries came because in such countries the old imperialists had managed to groom their old collaborators into the leaders of the new states.

Moreover the Israelis spent lavishly in Africa, and the VERED scandal, which exploded on the political stage in Israel in October-November 1972, revealed that the Israeli official operators sometimes use bribes to achieve certain ends. (The whole exposure was the subject of a non-confidence motion in the Israeli Parliament - Knesset early November, 1972).

In the light of the huge losses (reaching about 90 million Israeli Liras or about \$20 million) of the Vered company, which is the Israeli economic arm in hydraulic-operating in Asia and Africa, the observer can understand the calm of the Israeli ruling circles. They seem sure that the principal can bear the financial burden.

At any rate, according to Leopold Laufer, author of "Israel and the Developing Countries", "Israel's achievements in having more than half its efforts (in third world countries) financed from non-Israeli sources is probably unique in the tangled history of post-war technical assistance operations" (p.52).

CAUSES OF ISRAELI SETBACKS

A number of local and foreign observers have noted that Arab activity, whether financial or political, was responsible for the serious setback of Israel in Africa.

But this does not explain why Arab diplomacy was securing its successes now.

The statements of the African countries which broke relations with Israel are self-evident and expressive.

Thus, the Government of Congo (Brazzaville) in its statement severing its relations formally condemned "the imperialist and expansionist policy of Israel."

Niger did the same in different terms and demanded a just solution for the Middle East conflict "which would primarily take account of the rights of the Palestinian people and of our solidarity with our brother people of Egypt" (A.P. 2.2.1972.)

The President of Mali said in this connection:

"The Israelis must learn that until they change their imperialist and neocolonialist ambitions of . . . sabotaging the economies of African countries they will be chased away completely from the African continent." (Jewish Chronicle, 12.1.73).

The Mali Foreign Minister announcing the break added a basic element when he accused the Israeli occupation with founding villages in the occupied areas, forcibly expelling the residents and exploiting the population.

Coming less than a month after the resolution of the UN General Assembly on the Middle East (8.12.72) the African states which broke their relations with Israel seem to endorse this resolution and respond to its behests.

This resolution, reiterated the General Assembly's support to the Security Council Resolution 242, condemned Israel's attempts to change the physical and demographic character of the occupied areas and called upon all the states not only to abstain from recognising these changes, but to refrain from giving Israel any help, capable of being construed as support to its policy of creating faits accomplis there.

After a certain measure of silence on this score, Israeli and foreign circles are admitting that Israeli aggressive annexationist policy is responsible for the African moves which can herald a more extensive deterioration of Israel's position in Africa.

Writing with this in mind Al Hamishmar wrote "One thing Israel should do is to present her aspirations for peace in stronger and more convincing light (!) since this is the issue on which the Arab states are attempting to undermine Israel's relations with Africa." (7.1.73).

Dr Susan Aurela Gitelson, lecturer on international relations and African studies at the Hebrew University recognises that African states

are "concerned" with the substantive issue of the territories occupied in the six day war (Israeli June 1967 aggression - E.T.). Their own internal difficulties with separatist movements and their interstate boundary disputes, have led them to emphasize the importance of territorial integrity, which is also included prominently in the Organization of African Unity Charter.

In 1967, however, only Guinea actually broke off relations with Israel on these grounds. As time has passed more African states and the OAU as a whole have become increasingly adamant on this issue." (Jerusalem Post, 12.1.73).

Thus it is clear that the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories seized in the June war and the policy of annexation expressed in the establishment of colonial settlement there, are liable to accelerate the estrangement between Israel and Africa.

Moreover Israel identification with imperialism generally and with U.S. imperialism particularly is deepening and gaining in content. This is becoming more pronounced, as the U.S. comes forward more brazenly as the champion of Israel. It was significant that the U.S. for the first time since the June war used its veto power in the Security Council in September 1972 to save Israel from a resolution condemning its savage raids against refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria.

The British "Guardian" could not escape the fact - when commenting on Israel-African relations - that the African states which suffered under imperialism were shocked by Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories. At the same time the close relations between the U.S. and Israel arouses their suspicions. (19.1.73).

"OFFICIAL" SOLUTIONS

The Israeli ruling circles while reappraising their position in Africa are formulating new guidelines.

They understand the importance of this question. As David Golan said in "Davar's" symposium, the relations of Israel and the African states were a "great political asset of the first rank in Israel's relations with the United States, England and France." (19.1.73.).

He also said - in way of emphasis - that our strongest friends (meaning the U.S.) and also those in Europe are tired of standing alone. That is why every country (that stands with Israel - E.T.) in Asia and Africa is important.

However, not one Israeli official or supporter of the official policy reached the logical conclusions.

On the contrary, Abiezer Chelouche, a bank manager who was once involved in activities in Africa, discounted the only way capable of improving Israel's image in Africa. He said in an interview with Israel Neuman of Ha'aretz: "I eliminate from all possibilities Israeli evacuation to the green line (the Israeli lines before the June war) as a means to prevent the break of relations" with countries of Africa.

This means that Israeli ruling circles will continue their aggressive annexationist policy in collusion with U.S. imperialism.

In fact, "Ma'ariv" (17.1.73) suggests that Israel should aim at helping the countries of Africa to advance in the direction of a liberal economy (read: capitalism - E.T.).

It added Israel must integrate in the system of the states of the "Free World" (led by imperialism - E.T.) which has to exert every effort so that the Africans do not become passive instruments in the play for influence (!) between the Soviet Union and China (!) with the aid of the Arabs.

But the difficulty of the Israeli ruling circles lies in the fact that Israeli policy is becoming an anachronism in Africa. The fight against imperialism, neo-colonialism and local reaction is growing and becoming dominant. Israel's close collusion with U.S. imperialism, with the racist regime of South Africa and Rhodesia arouses the indignation of the peoples of Africa.

Under the circumstances it is no longer a question of this African country's relation with Israel or that. The Israeli setbacks in Africa are an expression of the growing isolation of Israel in the world.

The only way out, therefore, is a radical change of policy, in the direction of peace. Israel can only find its way back to these countries of Africa who broke diplomatic relations with it and prevent further deteriorations of its standing, if it conforms with UN Resolutions which lay down the foundations of a just peace in the Middle East based on Israeli evacuation of the occupied Arab territories and respect for the rights of all the peoples and states in the region, including the Israeli and Palestine Arab peoples.