

Israel's role in the Third World: exporting West Bank expertise*

That Israel ranks among the world's major arms exporters is by now general knowledge. According to CIA estimates, Israel is the fifth largest exporter of arms in the world, and the largest supplier of arms to Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. But Israel's activities in Third World countries are, in fact, far more wide-ranging than just military sales. Israel has become active in all the dimensions of the global counter-insurgency business. Thus, for example, in Guatemala, 'Hit lists used by the death squads have been computerised. Technologically sophisticated murder is coordinated by a Regional Telecommunications Center built and managed by Israeli Army experts.'¹ Israel's multifaceted relations with Guatemala include the following:

- Since 1976 Israel has been the main provider of arms, aircraft and military training to Guatemala.
- Training of 800 air force pilots to fly Israeli-supplied Kfir fighter and Arava transport planes.
- Israeli-supplied radar systems throughout the country.
- Training of the military and G-2 police units in the use of

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interrogation techniques, modern intelligence methods, psychological warfare and terror.

– An Israeli-sponsored Army Electronics and Transmission School, opened in November 1981.

– Assistance from 300 Israeli advisers in the coup of March 1982 that brought General Rios Montt to power, and their training of officers backing him.

– Assistance from Israeli advisers in the design of the Programme of Assistance to Conflict Areas (PAAC), put into effect from August 1982. Developed jointly with advisers from South Africa and Taiwan, the programme involves the creation of ‘model villages’ that combine features of the ‘strategic hamlets’ implanted in Vietnam and Israeli kibbutzim.

– A training camp in Guatemala where Israeli experts train ‘*contras*’, that also serves El Salvador, Honduras, Haiti, Chile and Bolivia and Argentina (at least before their return to civilian government).

– The construction, in the northern province of Alta Verapaz, of a factory for the production of 5.56 calibre munition and Uzi machine guns, which is to supply all of Central America.²

Israel is in the special position of having recent combat experience as well as current counter-insurgency experience (in the West Bank and Gaza). The lessons of the Middle East, as a testing ground for western military equipment against Soviet-supplied armies, are disseminated through the world via Israel. Especially during the past decade, Israel has come to specialise as a strong arm of the Pax Americana, and it has been performing this role not simply regionally but on a *global* scale.

Israel’s arms industry supplies, in Penny Lernoux’s phrase, a Who’s Who of dictators.³ In *Latin America and the Caribbean* recipients of Israeli military sales include: Mexico, El Salvador (80 per cent of military imports between 1970-80), Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua (until the fall of Somoza), Panama, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.⁴ Security assistance to El Salvador includes the presence of 100 Israeli advisers, reportedly the use of Israeli pilots to fly Israeli-supplied fighters in combat missions against the guerrillas, and the installation of a computer system (that was also supplied to Guatemala and Paraguay) that monitors the use of water and electricity, irregularities in which may indicate resistance activity.⁵

In *Africa* the list includes: South Africa, Swaziland, Malawi, Zaire, Central African Republic, Kenya, Uganda (at least until 1972), Gabon, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Morocco. Generally, the countries mentioned are also allies of the United States; but in addition, Israel supplies arms to Ethiopia, as part of a security relationship that dates back to the time of Haile Selassie.⁶ According to a March 1979 CIA report on *Israel: foreign intelligence and security services* – captured in Tehran in

1979⁷ – Israel trained the Liberian security service and police, helped establish Ghana's military intelligence and assisted in the re-establishment of Moroccan security services. Relations also exist between Israeli foreign intelligence (Mossad) and the intelligence services of Kenya and Zaire. Remarkably, in the case of South Africa and Ecuador, Israeli security assistance and arms supplies are paralleled by the export of biblical films, handled by the same people!⁸

In *Asia* Israel maintains the closest relations with Taiwan. Next is Singapore, where Israel trains several units of the army. Thailand has been receiving military supplies and training from Israel since the military coup of 1976. Other recipients of military sales are South Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia. With regard to Indonesia, Chomsky reported⁹ that Israel served as a conduit for the United States when Indonesia needed military aircraft for the massacre of the Timorese in the late 1970s. The above-mentioned CIA report notes:

The Israelis have operated for some time in East Asia. They have provided intelligence training to the government of the Republic of China and maintain liaison with it. The Israelis also have relations with the Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, and South Korean services, especially on terrorist matters. The major Mossad regional center in East Asia is Singapore. The Israeli station chief there frequently travels throughout the area and conducts business with neighboring nations. Indonesia as a Moslem nation does not have formal diplomatic ties with Israel. The Mossad-Indonesian relationship, therefore, is very discreet. The Mossad representative in Singapore is accredited to the Indonesian service. There are also Mossad officers in Jakarta under commercial cover. The primary reason for the Indonesian liaison is to gain aid in counterterrorist efforts. The Israelis, on the other hand, are not only engaging in antiterrorist operations but also have an opportunity to collect information and engage in political action in another Moslem power.

A recent addition to the Asian recipients of Israeli security assistance is Sri Lanka; an Israeli Interest Section has been opened in the US Embassy and Israeli advisers are reported to be training Lankan security personnel. In the Near East, Mossad maintains relations with the Turkey National Security Service, as part of a framework of cooperation, the Trident Organisation, that also included Iran's Savak and Ethiopia.

Since the early 1960s, Israel has been a member of the South Atlantic Treaty Organisation (SATO), made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and South Africa, with Taiwan and Israel as the only non-Atlantic members. The organisation was established in secrecy, under US auspices, with General Vernon Walters performing a coordinating role, 'to counter the threat of the Soviet Union in the South

Atlantic'.¹⁰ With the demise of military government in Argentina and 'openings' in Brazil, SATO may now be defunct. But cooperation between Israel, South Africa and Taiwan continues, notably in the nuclear field.

Israeli methods

{The Israelis} taught the Guatemalans how to build an air-base. They set up their intelligence network, tried and tested on the West Bank and Gaza. (Bob Simon, *CBS News*, 16 February 1983)

Israel's security activities do not simply consist of cooperating with a number of Third World countries, but of also establishing and training military and security services in some of them. To understand Israel's methods, one must look at Israel's source of expertise in the field of counter-insurgency – the West Bank and Gaza.

In fact, the West Bank and Gaza form part of a series which includes Galilee (1948), Sinai and Golan Heights. One might add south Lebanon, which some have begun to refer to as the 'North Bank'. Israel's attitude with regard to these areas has been that of the exclusionist colonial settler state, an attitude which calls to mind the approach of European immigrants to American and Carib Indians, and European settlers in South Africa and Australasia. While all of these represent memorable contributions to the annals of repression and ethnocide, Israel has been making its own distinct contribution, beginning with the occupation of Galilee. The key problem that Galilee, and later the West Bank and Gaza, presented to the Zionists is that *they wanted the land but not the people*. It is this *exclusionist* element that differentiates Zionism from the Third World nationalisms. The major components of Israeli policy vis-à-vis the occupied territories concern land, control and population policy.

As Yigal Allon, commander of the Haganah forces in the Galilee, recalled in his memoirs: 'We saw a need to clean the Inner Galilee and to create a Jewish territorial succession in the entire area of the Upper Galilee.'¹¹ The massacre of 254 Arab men, women and children in the village of Deir Yassin in April 1948 by the forces of Menachem Begin's Irgun, reinforced by a rumour campaign that further Jewish reinforcements would burn all the villages, is what started the mass flight of the Palestinians from their homes. And yet there remained what is known in Zionist parlance as the '*demographic problem*' – 63 per cent of the total population of the Northern District were Arabs. To control this situation there was the military occupation, which was formalised in 1950 and remained in effect until 1966. The military government was based on the British Defence (Emergency) Regulations of 1945; from 1967 the administration of the Emergency Regulations was transferred

from the military to the police, which was expanded by a Department of Special Duties. The regulations included the designation of Arab settlements as 'closed areas', requiring written permits from the military governor to leave or enter; and provisions for the banishment, administrative detention and house or town arrest of individuals – in short, they affected every aspect of Palestinian life, giving total jurisdiction and discretion to the military government. Israeli population policy, a policy of de-Arabisation and Judaisation, from 1953 onwards, took the form of the 'Project for the Judaisation of Galilee'. The sustained expropriation of Arab lands, effacement and destruction of Arab villages and towns, and forced emigration of Arabs were components of this policy. But the problem would not go away, and a Ministry of Agriculture publication dated 1975 still stated: 'It is necessary to change the existing situation regarding the demographic ratio between the Jewish population and the non-Jewish, by means of implementing a long-term development programme.'¹²

New variations on these themes were developed in relation to the occupied areas of the West Bank and Gaza from 1967. Land expropriations in 1975-6 in Western Galilee and the Nazareth region were met by a general strike in March 1976, and after this the settlement thrust took on more purposeful forms. In a secret memorandum to the Prime Minister, the District Commissioner of the Northern District recommended the following:

Expand and deepen Jewish settlements in areas where the contiguity of the Arab population is prominent and where they number considerably more than the Jewish population; examine the possibility of diluting existing Arab population concentrations.¹³

The policy of 'conquest through settlement' (rather than through land expropriation and military rule) was elaborated, under the auspices of the World Zionist Organisation, in the proposed plan for 'the development of settlement in Judea and Samaria, 1979-1983':

The disposition of the settlements must be carried out not only *around* the settlements of the minorities, but also *in between them*, this in accordance with the settlement policy adopted in Galilee and in other parts of the country (original emphasis).¹⁴

Hence, as Khalil Nakhleh observes, the 'chequered pattern of settlement', a pattern followed in Israel since the 1950s. This policy can be characterised as environmental planning for domination, informed by racial arithmetic. Also part of this architecture of domination are the *lookouts (mitzpim)*, tried first in the West Bank and, since then, in Galilee. In an area already confiscated, the military apparatus may designate a spot that overlooks an Arab concentration as a desirable location for a 'lookout': 'This means that without the need

for a large number of settlers (which is beneficial in a state of dwindling “pioneers”) a certain area can be claimed and held by the state. In 1979-80, Galilee was targeted for 29 such “lookouts”.¹⁵ With the redirection of development efforts to the West Bank and Gaza, policy regarding Galilee had to revert to military methods.

There are now some 70,000 workers from the occupied territories working inside Israel, at wages considerably lower than Israeli workers and without social benefit, health care, and so on.¹⁶ Super-exploitation of labour from the occupied territories forms part of the ladder of exploitation which includes Arabs inside Israel and the country’s majority population of Sephardic Jews, who also suffer discrimination and receive substandard wages. The Israeli monopoly of the market in the occupied territories, which constitutes a major share of its foreign trade, is another fruit of occupation.

Under Israeli occupation, existing legislation and economic measures are manipulated and new laws are created to ensure control. The use of development funds for reward and punishment also forms part of the same system. To circumvent popularly elected local leadership, a system of ‘quislings’ has been called into being, utilising kinship ties and clan structures to create agents of the military government among the population. In 1979 the ‘Village Leagues’, equipped with their own ‘security forces’, were created for this purpose in the West Bank: ‘They patrol streets at night; they attack cars and homes of outspoken nationalist Palestinians; and they attack nationalist institutions (as they did recently with Bethlehem University).’¹⁷ From ‘reprisal actions’ to ‘collective punishment’, Israel has demonstrated a growing expertise at ‘frontier justice’. A 1977 *Sunday Times* investigation concluded that torture by Israeli security services was systematic.¹⁸

In November 1981 the second Begin government instituted a Civil Administration in the West Bank. Installed in the wake of Begin’s campaign rhetoric about *Eretz Israel*, alongside efforts to uproot all expressions of Palestinian national resistance and to move the maximum number of Jews into settlements across the ‘green line’, the Civil Administration was interpreted in the West Bank as a step ‘to pave the way for the annexation of the occupied territories and tie them directly to the various Israeli ministries’.¹⁹ Hence it was greeted with a massive boycott and demonstrations, which unleashed an unprecedented wave of repression in the West Bank. ‘Demonstrations in the first months of 1982 resulted in more Arab casualties than had fallen in all previous fifteen years of occupation.’²⁰ At the time, settler vigilantes became more actively involved in doing the ‘dirty work’ of the occupation, displaying greater brutality than the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in forcing the Palestinians into submission or departure.

Rabbi Meir Kahane and the Kach party, Gush Emunim and TNT may be dismissed in Israel as a ‘lunatic fringe’, and contrasted to the

rationality and moderation of the Israeli mainstream; yet they echo the same themes that are upheld by the mainstream, and differ only in that they advocate more drastic variations of them. In a poll of September 1981, only 19 per cent opposed continued colonisation of the West Bank.²¹ Kahane, in *They Must Go* ('they' meaning Arabs), voices, only more loudly and shrilly, the same *demographic problem* that has been the continuous preoccupation of Israeli administrations: 'Should we allow demography, geography and democracy to push Israel closer to the abyss?'²² Kahane advocates overtly what at least a part of the Israeli power structure has been practising covertly. As emerged in a recent trial, the bombing attacks on three Arab mayors in 1980 involved Israeli army officers in the West Bank military government, as well as leading rabbis in the settler movement who were connected to the Tehiya party.²³ 'It is quite safe to assume', according to Adam Keller, 'that until mid-1983 a clear government policy of benevolent non-interference with the terrorists was followed.'²⁴ Prior to the trial, Prime Minister Shamir warned: 'Don't touch our messiahs who are creating historical facts for generations to come.'²⁵

An environment where the demographic obsession, founded on the conception of Israel as a Jewish state, looms so large and is constantly harped on by the Likud, an environment where sectarianism is promoted as state religion, is an environment that nourishes extremism. The theme of *race* ('demography') is being replayed so as to avoid dealing with questions of *class*, in particular the slumbering issue of discrimination against the Sephardim (Oriental Jews). The Sephardim are being used as pawns in the game, put to sleep with a cult of Jewishness as a substitute for justice, and lured into thinking that they can obtain, at the expense of the Palestinians, the justice denied them by the Ashkenazim. Thus they are tempted into the West Bank settlements, as it is there that they are offered the better housing that is not available to them in Israel. In opting for the 'strategy of tension' Likud, although the more extremist party, is in fact following in the footsteps of Labour, who pioneered the deliberate creation of a siege mentality in Israeli society. As Moshe Dayan said about the 'reprisal actions' of the 1950s: 'They ... help us maintain a high tension among our population and in the army.'²⁶ The Likud has been reaping the fruits of the 'high tension' sowed by Labour.

After this brief review of Israel's methods in its domestic environment, we may be in a better position to assess Israel's contribution overseas and look at the situation of some of the recipients of Israel's security assistance in the light of the Israeli experience.

* * *

The struggle in Guatemala is rooted in a similar problem. There, too, it

was the land that was wanted and not the people – the land, to grow coffee and cotton, not the people, because they are Indians. The majority Indian population has been losing land continuously for 450 years – but, until recently, though landless, they were at least part of a cheap labour force. Several years ago, groups of Indians migrated to the jungles of the north – but as soon as oil and nickel and other minerals were discovered in the region, they were thrown off this land as well. And this time they were not even wanted as cheap labour. Thus, Guatemala also had a *demographic problem*, and we encounter a configuration of policies similar to those of Israel, involving land, domination and exploitation, population policy and terror. The military, as part of the oligarchy, looms large in all these spheres, as a landowner in its own right, through military governments, and through methods of population control which involve terror as a strategy, and include the wholesale slaughter of entire villages.

Following the presidential elections that established the power of General Lucas García in 1978, terror was unleashed, notably with the massacre of Panzos of 29 May. Between 1977 and 1981 (the Carter years), Israel was the sole supplier of arms to Guatemala. The presence of Israeli advisers, along with Argentinians, was reported in 1981, at the time of the García government's July offensive.²⁷ Months later, in Israel, General Benditto García, Lucas' brother, Chief-of-Staff of the Guatemalan army, attributed the government's military success to Israel's assistance. He explained: 'We appreciate Israel; we see the Israeli as the best soldier in the world today, and we look to him as a model and an example to us.'²⁸ A sturdy compliment, considering that the Guatemalan army itself has displayed considerable skill in dealing with Guatemala's 'demographic problem' – the number of persons, mainly Indians, assassinated or 'disappeared' over the past fifteen years is estimated at 60,000, and that of refugees from Guatemala in Mexico alone at 150,000 (and there are tens of thousands of refugees inside Guatemala and in Honduras).²⁹ Since 1981, the emphasis has been on 'civic action' to 'pacify the country'; as a *New York Times* report notes: 'Schools and health clinics are built under "civic action" programs. Unfortunately, large numbers of peasants are often killed to deny the guerrillas their support.'³⁰ A recent development, in conjunction with the 'model villages', is the creation of 'civilian patrols' of villagers coerced into participating in local vigilante groups, a feature reminiscent of the West Bank.

Another country with a 'demographic problem' is South Africa. The congruence between apartheid and Zionism has been conspicuous enough to attract the attention of the UN General Assembly (1975). Both South Africa and Israel have turned questions of land and 'demography' (to abide by the Israeli euphemism) into national obsessions, and have devised elaborate systems of repression and

discrimination around them. Both view themselves as 'outposts of western civilisation'; both are wont to claim biblical justification and enjoy the support of organised religion domestically (though not unanimously); both are national security states with a broad emphasis on counter-insurgency and methods of psychological warfare. The parallels extend to the finer print as well, with South Africa's pass laws and Israel's special IDs for Arabs (stamped with a 'B') and requirements for travel passes in the occupied territories. South Africa's homeland policy exhibits a similar architecture of domination combined with racial arithmetic to that applied by Israel; Transkei, for example, is characterised by 'physical fragmentation of territory, combined with ethnic dispersal'.³¹ The extensive military, political and economic cooperation between the two countries has been frequently reported on;³² of interest at this point are the parallels between their policies vis-à-vis their surrounding frontline confrontation states.

Reciprocating South African assistance in the October 1973 war (South Africa sent a squadron of Mirages), Israel sent two dozen officers as experts on 'anti-terrorist' tactics to South Africa in 1974. In 1975 Israeli officers took part in drawing up South African plans for invading Angola. The invasion of Angola in 1975 conformed to the strategy of the 'pre-emptive strike' – attacking guerrilla forces in their bases across borders – as practised earlier by Rhodesian defence forces in their forays into Zambia and Mozambique.³³ However, the South African invasion was not just aimed against SWAPO bases, but in fact at Luanda, in order to install UNITA in the centre of power; it failed in this objective, due to Cuban intervention. South Africa's efforts to make Angola pay a high price for its support of SWAPO and to remove the ANC from neighbouring countries are similar to Israel's efforts to drive the PLO out of Lebanon. As South Africa sponsors the MNR in Mozambique and, jointly with the CIA, UNITA in Angola, so Israel maintains a presence in Lebanon through the 'Army of South Lebanon' of Major-General Antoine Lahd (the successor of Major Haddad); moreover, since 1976, Israel has been supplying the Phalangists with arms. When Israel went into Lebanon in June 1982, it was also with a dual objective: to destroy the institutional bases of the PLO and to push through to Beirut to see to the US-sponsored 'Phalangisation' of Lebanon. In the latter objective it failed. Encouraged by Israel's advance into Lebanon, the South Africans have invaded Angola anew and are now holding on to their positions in south Angola, just as Israel is maintaining her positions in south Lebanon. In Lebanon, Israel applied the strategy that General Haig, in 1981, was advocating in relation to Central America – 'going to the source'. It was in these terms that Richard Allen, US National Security Adviser, defended Israel's invasion of Lebanon: 'Reaching to the source is generally recognised as hot pursuit of a sort, and therefore

justified.³⁴ Claiming Nicaragua to be the 'source' of the Salvadoran insurgency, the US has, since December 1981, been practising the same approach in Central America. Israeli assistance on this front consists of military sales to Honduras and of acting as a back-up source to the *contras* in case US aid is cut off by Congress. In a visit to Honduras, former Defence Minister Sharon offered, free of charge except for transportation costs, weapons captured from the PLO. Thus the Middle East, southern Africa and Central America – today's three major 'regions of instability', according to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff³⁵ – are interconnected in at least as many ways as are Washington-Tel Aviv-Pretoria.

In 1977, Israeli technicians built an electrified 'wall' at the Namibia-Angola border, to keep SWAPO forces from entering Namibia.³⁶ Since 1982, a similar system of electronic border surveillance (*valla electronica*) has been under construction in Costa Rica on the border with Nicaragua.³⁷ It was precisely this item that brought a delegation of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Northern Ireland to Israel in January 1984. They believed a solution for the Irish problem could be found by erecting a £14m electric fence on the border with Ireland, touch-sensitive, monitored with computers and with permanently manned security posts every five miles.³⁸ The DUP is the largest Unionist party in Northern Ireland, led by the Reverend Ian Paisley. Apparently, the world's 'demographic problems' may not be quite confined to the so-called Third World.

* * *

A newcomer to the Israeli sphere of interest is Sri Lanka. The situation of the Tamils in Sri Lanka has been described as a 'classic minority problem'. Discriminatory practices carried out by the majority Sinhala government virtually since independence, efforts at colonisation in Tamil areas and outbreaks of anti-Tamil mob violence in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983 have gradually transformed the cry for Tamil autonomy to a cry for Tamil Eelam separation.³⁹ After years of non-violent resistance, this has transformed the Tamil struggle into an armed struggle. During the 'Black July' of 1983, Sinhala massacres of Tamils and the destruction of Tamil businesses and property went on with soldiers and policemen standing idly by. Under the guise of combating the 'terrorism' of the Tamil Tigers, the military has moved into the predominantly Tamil areas in the north, assuming broad authorities under the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act. Acts of state terrorism in the North, particularly during March and April 1984, have taken on the form of 'collective punishment'.⁴⁰ Since early 1984, Israeli security advisers have been called in to train Lankan security personnel. Already, the structural similarities between the Tamils of Sri Lanka

and the Palestinians are notable – again, policies centred on land, control, demography and terror combine in order to consolidate a configuration of Sinhala hegemony. Right-wing Buddhists, who view the Sinhalese as chosen guardians of Buddhism, have already prepared the way – ‘To some extent the Tamils are cast in the role of the Philistines, “good” kings being those who, like Dutthagamani, smote the Tamils hip and thigh, and did so, partly at least, with religious motives.’⁴¹ In order to break up areas of contiguous Tamil habitation, inroads into predominantly Tamil areas in the Eastern and Northern provinces have been made by Sinhalese settlers, supported by government and police, and encouraged by right-wing Buddhist clergy, acting like the local equivalent of Gush Emunim. Over the past year, this scheme to create ‘chequered patterns of settlement’ has been supplemented by the establishment of army camps in the north. The Jaffna peninsula is gradually being turned into a Lankan West Bank. Sinhala chauvinism used as an instrument of state power again calls to mind the psychological climate of Israel. On the basis of an analysis of Israeli policies on the West Bank, one could almost predict the forms Israeli security advice in Sri Lanka is taking.

Situations such as the above – only a sample of Israel’s global security operations – suggest other dimensions beyond Israel’s role as one of the major arms exporters – Israel as an accessory to state-organised terrorism, and holocaust, certainly in the case of Guatemala and South Africa, perhaps in others as well. South African invasions in Angola – planned with Israeli advice – have resulted in cold-blooded massacres, such as the attack on innocent men, women and children in the refugee camp of Cassinga on 4 May 1978. A sinister pattern suggests itself: the export of West Bank expertise. Thus, in the shadows cast by Deir Yassin, Kibye, Beirut, Sabra and Shatila, other silhouettes emerge – Cassinga, Panzos, Chiapas.

Israel’s strategy

‘We will say to the Americans: Don’t compete with us in Taiwan; don’t compete with us in South Africa; don’t compete with us in the Caribbean or in other places where you cannot sell arms directly ... Let us do it. You will sell the ammunition and equipment through an intermediary. Israel will be your intermediary.’ (Ya’acov Meridor, *Ha’aretz*, 25 August 1981)

Official or semi-official statements concerning Israel’s involvement in Third World countries usually say that Israel is interested in furthering its arms sales and technological exports as well as improving its diplomatic ties with Third World countries. The arms business helps Israel overcome the diplomatic isolation imposed on it by Arab countries, according to a recent report published by Tel Aviv University’s

Jaffee Institute for Strategic Studies.⁴² Israel's involvement in Honduras/Nicaragua and El Salvador is said to be related to reports of links between the PLO and Central American movements.⁴³ Sometimes the defence of Jewish communities in some of the importing states is also mentioned as a consideration. Underlying these considerations there is a more involved strategic thinking.

Key elements in understanding Israel's strategy in relation to Third World countries are Israel's notion of self-reliance and the relationship between Israel and the US. Israeli self-reliance dates back to the Zionist idea of self-emancipation of the 1880s, reformulated by Ben Gurion, as 'orientation on ourselves', and since become a part of Israel's national security doctrine, at least according to Dan Horowitz.⁴⁴ This has taken shape in, among other things, Israel's arms industry. However, the fact that Israel's military industry has been developed with massive US assistance and participation – financial, technical and corporate – is a reminder that Israel's 'self-reliance' has flourished under US tutelage.

Israel's victory in the 1967 war changed the balance of forces in the region, and, in a major development, the US provided Israel with fifty Phantom fighters in 1968. US-Israeli collaboration during the Jordanian crisis of 1970 strengthened mutual relations. But, above all, the onset of the 'Vietnam syndrome' in the US, detente and the Nixon-Kissinger doctrine of 'sub-imperialism' inspired the momentous, almost tenfold, increase in US military assistance to Israel in the 1971-3 period. Moreover, 'In November 1971, the US quietly signed an agreement to provide technical information and assistance that would allow Israel to produce advanced weapons components itself. This had important immediate economic advantages for Israel, allowing it to develop further its military-industrial base and become an important arms manufacturer and exporter in its own right.'⁴⁵

The October war of 1973, followed by the oil embargo initiated by the Saudis, gave another boost to Israeli 'self-reliance' under US sponsorship. On the Israeli side, there was concern 'to prevent a situation that would allow an outside power – namely the United States – to dictate the terms of a future cease-fire by threatening to withhold vital military supplies'; while on the part of the US, 'one can presume the interest of US strategists in avoiding any need to resupply Israel with weapons and munitions during future active hostilities'.⁴⁶

Thus, the purchase by Israel of entire production lines from the US, the production of weapons produced under US licence, and of several major Israeli military products (e.g., Kfir-C2, IAI-202 Arava), date from 1973 and after. A major Israeli military export item such as the Kfir jet fighter (a rebuild of Dassault's Mirage V) uses approximately 45 per cent US components, including a General Electric engine. The semblance of Israeli autonomy in arms production helped maintain the pretence of US evenhandedness in the Middle East. It also served to

shield the Washington-Riyadh axis from radical Arab criticism at a time when it had become a crucial avenue to keep OPEC in line.

In 1974, with the Nixon-Kissinger administration, another US-Israeli agreement concerning strategic cooperation was signed. US military sales to Israel had grown from \$140m in 1968-70 to \$1.2 billion in 1971-3 and \$4.5 billion in 1974-6.⁴⁷ In 1979 a Memorandum of Agreement was concluded, followed by the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Defence Minister Sharon and Secretary of Defence Weinberger on 30 November 1981. It is reported that this included a secret clause regarding a military plan for Latin America, involving 'the participation of Israel in the case of an invasion of Nicaragua or Cuba'.⁴⁸

In late December 1981, Defence Minister Sharon spoke at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Tel Aviv on Israel's military plans:

A source of growing anxiety for us and the Western world which will certainly develop into the most important challenge for the eighties is the Soviet expansionist strategy directed at the Middle East and Africa. It should be perfectly clear that in the new strategic environment, Israeli security interests are influenced by developments and events which occur outside the sphere in which Israel has hitherto concentrated its attention ... Beyond the first, traditional circle of confrontation which surrounds Israel, Israeli strategic interests demand that we expand into two geographic regions, which constitute a security interest for us: the peripheral Arab states and all those peripheral countries, the status and political-strategic orientation of which may have dangerous effects on Israel's national security.⁴⁹

A strategic reorientation for Israel was also outlined in Oded Yinon's *Strategy for Israel in the Eighties*,⁵⁰ published in February 1982. Yinon starts from the premise that Arab states in the region, in view of their internal divisions (along political, religious and ethnic lines) and economic problems, constitute a threat to the state of Israel only in the short run, not in the long run. Israel's strategy in the region should be aimed at the break up or dismemberment of Arab states, by means of forming alliances with ethnic and political minorities in the region – the strategy followed in Lebanon. The threat to Israel in the long run, however, is considered to be Soviet influence (specifically, aiming to gain control over the Persian Gulf and southern Africa), in the light of the 'resource war'.

These were echoes of US foreign policy, but with a difference: the orientation of strategy from 'Arab threat' to 'Soviet threat' was combined with an implicit project of regional hegemony and an enlarged definition of Israel's national security interests. After visiting Namibia in 1982, Ariel Sharon defined Israel's strategic concerns to include Africa and much of Asia.⁵¹ In April 1983 statements by Defence

Minister Moshe Arens about a reorganisation of the IDF were accompanied by a map showing Israel's 'Arc of Intervention', stretching from Tunisia to Afghanistan.⁵²

In 1981, Ya'acov Meridor, economic coordination minister, told a gathering of Israeli businessmen: 'Israel coveted the job of top Washington proxy in Central America.'⁵³ Financial assistance to El Salvador, refused by the US Congress, was supplied instead by Israel (\$21m in 1981) through the back door, to be repaid out of the \$2.5 billion of US aid going to Israel annually; in a similar predicament over the *contras* operating against Nicaragua, Israel bailed out the CIA in April 1984 with between \$20m and \$30m⁵⁴ – a qualitatively different type of assistance from arms sales and training, which were also provided. Israeli advisers in South Africa in 1981 numbered 200. In sum, Israel volunteered to do the 'dirty work' of the New Cold War. What in 1976 had been a cause of concern in Pentagon circles, that Israel could re-export American technology to other nations, circumventing Congressional restrictions, became an *asset* in 1981 with a New Right administration in the White House that was bent on circumventing Congressional restrictions. A long-term strategic understanding between American and Israeli circles emerged, or reemerged, from the backrooms of policy implementation into the Oval Office.

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The mainstay of Israel's aspirations to power is its military industry. According to Professor Aharon Kleiman of the Tel Aviv University Centre for Strategic Studies:

The arms industry of Israel is based on the interests of a powerful lobby of the heads of the defence and industrial establishment, including the Histadrut [trade union] industry ... They identify their specific interests with the interests of the state. A common military history strengthens their tendency to judge policy according to immediate results; they are pragmatic and tend to be cynical at what seem to them to be false moral norms.⁵⁵

Amongst them is Shimon Peres, leader of Labour, a driving force in building Israel's arms industry, founder of Israel Aircraft Industry and Tadiran, and an architect of Israel's nuclear capability.

Israel's arms exports represent 40 per cent of export revenues (in 1980), and the military industry occupies 14 per cent, and, according to a more recent estimate, 20 per cent of Israel's labour force, i.e., one out of every five workers. So, formidable economic stakes are also tied up with the military business. For the country with by far the world's highest per capita foreign debt – four million people owing \$25 billion abroad – a 400 per cent inflation rate and a stagnant GNP, the

economic dimension is by no means unimportant.

Israel's military-industrial complex is linked, on the one hand, to the US military-industrial complex and, on the other, to South Africa and Taiwan. Decades of dependence on the US has now put Israel in a position where it has a limited degree of autonomy. Israel has also developed a global network of right-wing connections that might give it if not some autonomy, then leverage in case of a shift in US foreign policy. Here, the alliance with South Africa and Taiwan comes in – both countries with considerable industrial capacity, whose elites are covering themselves against the same contingency for reasons of their own. Israel as part of a league of 'pariah nations', vanguard of a transnational ultra-right wing pressure group – with a grip on strategically sensitive areas and with nuclear capabilities – is thus one possible scenario. A related scenario is that of Israel as a 'wild card' (as in Sharon's idea that Israel should behave as an unpredictable, 'crazy country'). Such a 'pariah league' would be vulnerable notably in terms of oil supplies, foreign trade, technology and finance – although South Africa has been known to get by.

With the theme of the 'Soviet threat' coming to the foreground and the 'Arab threat' fading into the background, Israel's strategic planning loses its 'pragmatic' character, even its character of 'national defence', and becomes strongly ideologised instead. This ideological commitment is evident, for instance, in the offer of captured PLO weapons to Central American armies free of charge, a gesture that falls outside the purview of military business as well as national defence. It is also there when Sharon talks about Israel as a middle military power that must play a role in the global conflict between the free capitalist West and the communist world.⁵⁶ Israeli military planning has thus entered the twilight zone of superpower ideology.

In the US, the 'Soviet threat' is the royal road towards re-establishing US hegemony through leadership of the collective security system. In Israel, only this can justify the sustained militarisation of the society in the absence of a military threat from the PLO or Arab nations. It is a reorientation of strategy that is the logical sequel to Lebanon. As in the case of the US, it serves as a justification for activities in Third World countries that are repugnant from any other point of view. If the outcomes of all conflicts throughout the world, domestic and regional, are translated into 'loss' or 'gain' from a superpower point of view, then dirty work may pass for noble calling. In such an ideologised comic book version of global relations, simple concerns such as social justice dwindle to insignificance because reality itself is no longer an issue in a perspective that is concerned only with power. Israeli interest in serving as an offshore affiliate of the American New Right is that it diverts attention from the Palestinian question and because, under the umbrella of 'collective security', Israel

can elaborate its own aspirations to power.

Strategies followed in Central America, the Middle East and southern Africa are so many carbon copies of one another that it is difficult to identify the original. US, Israeli and South African strategies resemble each other so closely in objectives, tactics and material, that they may be considered as constituting one pool of imperialist and counter-insurgency expertise and technology. With Israelis active in southern Africa, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and the borders of Nicaragua, South Africans in Israel, Taiwanese in Guatemala, and so forth, it's a small world. One might call the 'portable West Bank' part of this *imperial pool*. If British strategies in Northern Ireland are taken into account, one may include Britain in this pool, as part of the expertise that is percolating within the system. This imperial pool is a dimension of the collective security system led by the US. Hence, it includes western Europe through NATO, Japan and allied South-east Asian countries, ANZUS, and the OAS. In other words, Israel's activities in Third World countries, on the fringes of the US collective security system, are in fact being undertaken as an intermediary on behalf of the 'western world'.

Questions

'After all this we wonder, "Why are we not loved?" and blame "anti-semitism" or "Arab money" instead of asking ourselves what we are doing to the world.' (Israel Shahak)

'You shall not oppress a stranger, you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt.' (Exodus 23:9)

Up to the fifteenth century, Jews, in Spain and Portugal, formed a bridge between Islam and Christianity in a creative confluence of cultures. After all, Judaism is at the root of both. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, Theodor Herzl described the 'Jewish state' to be as 'a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism'.⁵⁷ During the *galut* or exile, Jews, an Oriental people by origin, had become a European people, by acculturation. While in the eleventh century nearly 96 per cent of world Jewry was Sephardic, by 1930 the trend had completely reversed and 92 per cent of world Jewry was Ashkenazic.⁵⁸ Thus they returned from the diaspora a different people from when they left. They returned to the Orient with European ignorance and contempt, with a Crusader outlook, with European traumas.

Zionism was the reaction of Jewish communities to the oppression perpetrated against Jews throughout the centuries of European history, particularly in contemporary Eastern and Central Europe. In this sense, the movement belongs to the sombre chapters of European history and in no way to the East.⁵⁹

Third World peoples, who had no history or knowledge of a 'Jewish problem', observed how Israel stood with Europe and the US in the widening North-South rift. An instance of European colonisation in the era of decolonisation, Israel is in the Third World but not of the Third World. Located on the fault line between western imperialism and Third World nationalism, Israel behaves as a fifth column of empire.

Erik Hooglund asked: 'Why is it wrong for the United States to provide military assistance to countries which violate human rights, but not so for Israel?'⁶⁰ It is wrong for Israel also; but in the US and Europe, Israel continued and still continues to evoke sympathy and support, a support based not least on cultural affinities and affinity with Zionism as the historical counterpart of antisemitism, as the 'solution' to the Jewish problem. While the Holocaust ranks high in European-American historical consciousness, a central part of their own historical drama, the historical traumas of peoples 'on the other side of the river' are not as near.

— No longer a bridge between Christianity and Islam, Israelis have become the allies of Christianity. In Africa, Israel finds political niches on the side of Christian groups resisting Islamic inroads, and certain Asian countries call on Israel as a counterweight against Islamic influence. Zionism also finds itself in league with fundamentalist Christianity — Christian Zionists who share Zionist fundamentalism in terms of their claims to Eretz Israel, and who likewise take the word after the letter and not after the spirit. Under the Likud governments these ties became closer — Reverend Jerry Falwell, founder of the 'Moral Majority', was presented Israel's Jabotinsky award by Begin. Ties became closer at a time when fundamentalist Christianity was also being mobilised, in Latin America, Africa and parts of Europe, in the battle for hearts and minds against communism — in effect as an antidote against the spread of liberation theology and the people's church.

In adopting the US foreign policy perspective of a 'resource war', Israel is adopting an instrumentalist attitude to the world, a Realpolitik perspective, according to which only 'resources' matter, disregarding people and social relations. It is precisely from this kind of perspective that the US government has been looking at Israel all along — from the 1949 National Security Council memorandum which noted the strategic location of Israel, to Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger who called Israel an '*unsinkable aircraft carrier*' close to strategic Middle East oil fields.⁶¹ An '*unsinkable aircraft carrier*' is a peculiar way to describe a country; it evokes the image of a country that does not exist except as the launching pad of some project of power. This appears to be the political reality of what Begin insisted on calling the 'Holy Land'. This military simile follows US influence like a shadow, witness the terminology of Prime Minister Nakasone in 1982: 'I want the

Japanese archipelago to be like an unsinkable aircraft carrier.'⁶²

There are no 'Soviets' in Guatemala – there are no Soviet-supplied arms, for that matter; nor are there 'Soviets' in Sri Lanka. But there are resources in Guatemala, and Sri Lanka may well be understood to be another of those 'unsinkable aircraft carriers', strategically located off the Indian subcontinent, and on sea lanes between US bases in the Philippines and Guam, and Diego Garcia. And there are Indians in Guatemala, descendants of the Maya culture who, in recognising Christianity and the scriptures as a major inspiration of the Central American revolution, also acknowledge their spiritual debt to Judaism. There is one question, however, that bothers them profoundly: How can it be that a people that inspired us so much to take up the fight against injustice, we now find arraigned against us as the enemies of our people?

In fact, it is not the Jewish people that are assisting Guatemalan juntas in massacring the Indians, but Israeli ruling circles – Israeli ruling circles who have adopted the cheap imperial world view, who are taking sides in a class struggle on a global scale. Israel's global role is paralleled by its domestic class realities, where Sephardim are second-class citizens, Arabs third-class, and people in the occupied territories count only as obstacles to creating 'facts on the ground'. If it should occasion surprise that Israel maintains connections with right-wing and ultra right-wing circles throughout the world, it may help to recall that this is in line with the record of the Zionist movement, which cooperated with imperialists, fascists and Nazis alike.⁶³ Israel's ties with the Somoza family date back to 1947, with Guatemala to 1948, with South Africa to the role of Jewish capitalists in the South African economy before the turn of the century. This is another reason why Israel's role in the Third World should not be simply reduced to clientship of the US: Zionism has developed in this direction also by virtue of the logic of its own historical path. Several influences have combined to create this logic.

In the first place, there was the influence of an upper stratum of Jews, a financial elite who assisted in the expansion of European imperialism; Rothschild, for example, provided the credit that enabled the British to buy shares in the Suez Canal concession. The political anti-semitism of the late nineteenth century was orchestrated in part to divert anti-capitalist sentiments into ethnic, anti-Jewish channels. Ostensibly aimed at Jewish finance capitalists, in effect it hit the Jewish working class, the majority of whom were socialists themselves. This was the scheme, to redirect energies away from class struggle, to fan the flames of nationalism, chauvinism and racism, and to destroy the socialist movements, in which Jews played an important part. If anti-semitism was one of the orchestrated alternatives to class struggle, Zionism took no interest in social revolution either. A conservative

movement, not only did it not have the support of most Jews in eastern and central Europe, it was actively opposed by the majority, as a betrayal of the universalist commitments of Jewish people, which found expression in their allegiance to the Bund and other socialist organisations. Zionism operated in the orbit of the imperialist and reactionary powers, in no manner a revolutionary movement but rather a diplomatic effort. While ignored and rejected by the majority of Jews, it found support among the upper stratum of Jews who were part and parcel of the imperialist ambience. The option of settlement in Palestine only began to draw majority support when anti-Jewish measures intensified and the Holocaust machine came into operation, at a time when other countries, including the US, closed their borders to Jewish refugees – Israel, as Isaac Deutscher said, was created as ‘an act of despair’.

Since then, another dynamic has come into operation. Paolo Freire warned that the greatest danger for the oppressed is to become like the oppressor. The Holocaust unveiled a malice of such magnitude, an abyss so wide, that normal psychological and political patterns were broken through. An existential perplexity about the human condition permitted a collective role reversal – from victims to perpetrators. It is in this direction that the record of Israel, vis-à-vis both the Palestinian people and Third World countries, points. If Israelis say they ‘did not know’, it is true that Israeli media are censored. What may be underlying this process of role reversal is the logic of fear, and finding protection from fear in conforming with the aggressor. This was the pattern of Zionism, as anti-semitism was not resisted but accommodated to. Israel has not broken with the logic of fear. Rather, the logic of fear has been converted into the logic of power; the essential mechanism of this process is mimicry, for in a world that continues to be dominated by the same type of forces that unleashed the Holocaust, Israel seeks protection in behaving in the same way. The psychological meaning of Zionism is that its adherents have chosen to side with the perpetrators rather than the victims. When Begin says ‘Never Again’, it means in effect ‘Never Again us’; and, consequently, it means others – Palestinians, Guatemalan Indians, and so forth.

Israel's connection with Third World fascism stems from the same root as Zionism's connection with fascism. It is a consequence of the alliance with imperialism – an alliance that came naturally to an upper stratum of Jews, but that came to the majority of Jews only at a time when there practically was no other choice. The alternative was social revolution, the road the majority of Jews did follow, at a time when all the fury of western power structures was unleashed against the forces of socialism, which threatened to overturn their global chessboard. Fascism and Nazism – power unbound – were promoted by western power structures as gambits against socialism and communism. Third

World fascism partakes of the same logic of power – without make-up. It is the face of imperialism as it appears without a mask, nourished and supported by the same type of forces that nourished and supported Hitler.

Revocation of the experience of the Holocaust seems to be fruitless if it is not combined with a commitment to uncover the historical truth of who supported and financed Hitler, and who benefited, and continues to benefit, from fascism, and with compassion for the victims of holocausts that are being perpetrated now. The Jewish people have become an existentially inward looking people, drawn into a closed circle of fear. That Israeli repression stems from a different historical consciousness than that of its imperial patron, a logic of power informed by fear rather than by arrogance and greed, is small comfort to the victims, to whom the net product is identical.

What an irony of history that the words of the prophets, recited but not resonating in the synagogues of Israel, should be taken to heart in the mountains of Central America. Christian liberation theology has been inspired more than anything by the Jewish experience (Exodus, Exile), but there has been no development of a Judaic liberation theology. Zionism is the substitute for Judaic liberation theology; but it is concerned with the liberation of Jews as Jews, not with the liberation of Jews as humanity. Zionism has ethnicised, nationalised Jewishness.

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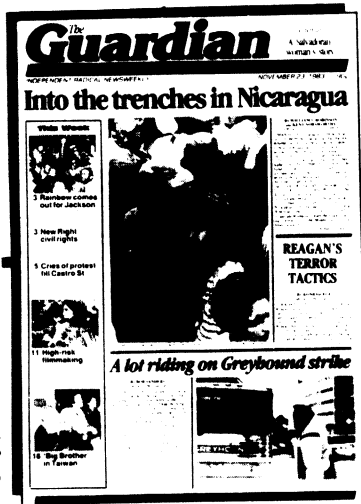
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