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The Nation

The Banquo's Ghost of Israeli Foreign Policy

Max Blumenthal
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A May 6 "expose" from the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* gave Israeli government officials and their hardline American proxies the ammunition they had been seeking against Judge Richard Goldstone. After Goldstone, a Jewish former South African judge who describes himself as a proud Zionist, charged Israel with crimes against humanity for its assault on the Gaza Strip in late 2008 and 2009, the Israeli government sought to destroy him. Now, thanks to *Yediot*'s report, which documented Goldstone's career as a judge in South Africa's apartheid system and ignored his heroic role in guiding the country's democratic transition, Israel and its allies have renewed their assault.

According to an editorial [1] by Alan Dershowitz, Goldstone "helped legitimate one of the most racist regimes in the world... he had climbed the judicial ladder on whipped backs and hanged bodies." Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic Magazine* followed up, calling Goldstone, "a man without a moral compass." The attack spread throughout the neocon blogosphere, including to *Tablet*, where Marc Tracy accused Goldstone of publishing his report about the assault on Gaza to alleviate his "severe case of guilt." Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon piled on, characterizing [2] the judge's explanation for working inside the apartheid system as "the same explanation we heard in Nazi Germany after World War II."

However, by assailing Goldstone's reputation to protect Israel from the meticulously documented facts and modest recommendations contained in his report about the assault on Gaza, Israel's right-wing government and its American allies unwittingly summoned the Banquo's Ghost of

Israeli foreign policy: the country's longtime military alliance with South Africa's apartheid regime.

In the wake of the 1973 war, Israel initiated a close relationship with apartheid South Africa, exchanging intelligence, nuclear technology, arms and military strategy with the white supremacist government. Though figures from Israel's Labor Party initiated the connection with purely cynical motives, the Likudniks who now dominate Israeli politics consolidated the alliance along the lines of ideological affinity, nurturing cozy personal relationships with the architects of apartheid. Israel was apartheid South Africa's most dependable ally, sustaining its racist system even after the rest of the world recoiled in disgust, and perhaps learning a thing or two along the way.

This sordid and under-examined relationship comes to life on the pages of _The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa,_ [3] a meticulously researched book that reads like a spy thriller. The author, Foreign Affairs senior editor Sasha Polakow-Suransky, spent seven years on his project, conducting interviews with key players from Israel and South Africa, mining South Africa's apartheid-era archive and resurrecting documents and articles that the Israeli Foreign Ministry would prefer remain forgotten. Rich with intrigue and shocking details but written without a trace of stridency, _The Unspoken Alliance_ is the most authoritative account to date of Israel's scandalous dealings with the apartheid regime of South Africa.

Readers of the book will learn that while serving as Israeli defense minister, Shimon Peres nurtured his country's diplomatic relationship with South Africa even while publicly condemning apartheid. After a secret trip to Pretoria in 1974, when Peres first proposed the alliance, he assured his South African hosts that "this relationship is based not only on common interests and on the determination to resist equally our enemies, but also on the unshakeable foundations of our common hatred of injustice and our refusal to submit to it." The following year, Peres signed a secret security pact with South African defense minister P.W. Botha that led immediately to $200 million in arms deals.

Peres and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin welcomed South African Prime Minister B.J. Vorster to Israel in 1976, taking him on a tour of the Western Wall and the requisite stop at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. It did not seem to matter to Peres or Rabin that Vorster had been an outspoken supporter of Nazi Germany during World War II, or that he devised the policy of torture and repression against his country's black opposition. Though Vorster's disturbing past was well known, he encountered few organized protests while gallivanting around Jerusalem.. The Israeli media almost unanimously avoided harsh criticism of the visit, while the _Jerusalem Post_ fawned over the apartheid leader for "recharting his country's racial and foreign policy." Back in South Africa, a leading daily called the visit "one of the most successful diplomatic coups in [Vorster's] ten years in office."

When Menachem Begin led the right-wing Likud Party into power in 1977, ties between Israel and South Africa's military brass deepened. Appointed as Defense Minister in 1981, Ariel Sharon became a key link to the apartheid regime; along with Army chief of staff Raful Eitan, he became fast friends with South African military commander Magnus Malan. Days after Israel

bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 ("not to allow these crazy Arabs to possess nuclear weapons," as Eitan wrote), earning harsh condemnations from governments around the world, Malan relayed his sympathy to Eitan, "It is comforting to know that South Africa does not stand alone in facing criticism from the international community," Malan wrote to his counterpart. "Our respective countries will have to withstand this in many manifestations." Then, when Sharon resigned after his role in the grisly Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut came to light, Malan wrote to thank his disgraced counterpart for the "friendly and understanding way in which you have conducted matters of mutual interest between ourselves and our respective Defense Forces."

But South Africa and Israel were bound together in their respective battles against the ANC and PLO by much more than a shared anti-communist agenda. In their private correspondences, as Polakow-Suransky documents, leaders from the two countries discussed their alliance in terms of a holy war against the dark-skinned hordes. As Israel's former ambassador to apartheid South Africa, a Likudnik named Eliahu Lankin, wrote to his South African allies in 1987, "What the ANC is demanding today is nothing less than 'one man, one vote'... If the whites were to agree to this in present circumstances, they would be committing suicide, not only politically but physically as well." Eitan made no secret of his fears about empowering the demographic majority, warning before an audience at Tel Aviv University that blacks "want to gain control over the white majority just like the Arabs here want to gain control over us. And we, too, like the white minority in South Africa, must act to prevent them from taking us over."

During the mid-1980's, while Western governments gradually divested from South Africa, the Laborites Rabin and Peres maintained practical imperatives for continuing the alliance. When the idealistic young Foreign Ministry director-general Yossi Beilin lobbied Peres to support sanctions against South Africa, Peres angrily summoned Mossad chief Nahum Admoni to berate Beilin, insisting to him at Peres' behest that the white minority government would not give up power for another thirty years no matter what the international community did. For his part, Rabin justified opposing sanctions on the grounds that they would "mean the firing of tens of thousands of workers" in Israel's defense industry. Israeli labor unions echoed Rabin's argument. In 1988, one year after Israel finally imposed sanctions on South Africa, its arms sales to the apartheid government totaled over $1.5 billion.

"Israel was probably our only avenue in the 1980's," South Africa's former Air Force chief Jan van Loggerenberg told Polakow-Suransky.

By the mid-1980's, international opinion had turned solidly against South Africa's government. In the United States, the anti-apartheid movement had broken into the mainstream, gathering celebrity support and powerful allies in the Congressional Black Caucus. Seeking to reverse the tide, South African intelligence agents found an eager accomplice in the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a New York-based Jewish outfit supposedly dedicated to combating bigotry.

Under the leadership of Irwin Suall, a former communist who came to see the American left as a threat to Israel's existence, the ADL deployed a spy named Roy Bullock to the mission, dispatching him to infiltrate US-based anti-apartheid groups and monitor the movements of visitors like Archbishop Desmond Tutu. While the ADL concealed Bullock's salary by paying

him through a shadowy Los Angeles law firm, Bullock collected a paycheck from South Africa's intelligence service, which also benefited from his "findings." The ADL supplemented its skullduggery with a propaganda campaign against the ANC. In a 1986 article, ADL national director Nathan Perlmutter called Nelson Mandela and the ANC "totalitarian, anti-humane, anti-democratic, anti-Israel and anti-American."

The apartheid regime's former allies in the ADL now readily concede that the state of Israel is engaged in a legitimacy battle remarkably similar to the one South Africa faced. Together with Dershowitz and the usual "pro-Israel" voices, the ADL assails any public figure who dares use the term "apartheid" in the context of Israel's policies in the occupied West Bank, tainting them with accusations of anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has personally authorized a campaign of political warfare against Judge Goldstone and the human rights NGOs who contributed data to his report on the Gaza assault, accusing them of waging "lawfare" against the Jewish State.

Netanyahu appears in *The Unspoken Alliance* in a remarkable cameo. As one of the Likud Party's rising stars, Netanyahu was deployed before the UN General Assembly in 1986 to rebut charges that Israel was assisting South Africa's apartheid regime. Larded with diversions and outright deceptions about Israel's trade ties with South Africa, Netanyahu's speech was immediately discredited. At the same time, his bravado performance helped pave his path to the prime minister's office.

Netanyahu ended his speech with a stentorian denunciation of the apartheid system. "The battle against apartheid has reached an historic junction," he boomed from the podium. "It can either surge forward on a straight path to the total abolition of this hateful system. Or it can sink into the mud of falsehood and vindictiveness." His words grow more ironic by the day.