DIRTY SCAPEGOATS: EXPLAINING ISRAEL'S TIES WITH SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE 1970s AND 1980s

Yehonatan Alsheh[1]

Abstract

The article surveys five possible explanations for the ties between Israel and South Africa between the 1970s and 1980s. (1) The Industrial-Military Complex Explanation, arguing that both the Israeli and South African defence establishments and arms industries had much to gain from such a relationship, and enough political influence to ensure that this would indeed happen. (2) The Nuclear Alliance Explanation, arguing that it was in Israel and South Africa's national interest to forge a nuclear consortium that would enable them to attain and further develop significant nuclear capacities, conceived by both states as the ultimate means for guaranteeing the survival of their chronically-contested regimes. (3) The Ideological Affinities / similar Regime-Type Explanation, arguing that, while Israel was unable or in any case reluctant to publicly admit it, it was not averse to the South African regime of separate development, mostly because, ever since 1967, it was on a course of constructing its own version of such a regime. (4) The Pariah States Alliance Explanation, arguing that Israel and South Africa shared the same international status of pariah states, hence having no other states they could befriend, and in any case nothing to lose from collaborating with each other. (5) The Politics of International Pariah-Making Explanation, arguing that the concept of the pariah state – which emerged in 1977 and disappeared by the end of the 1980s – was not a naïve scholarly attempt to conceptualize a new type of international actor, but rather an ideological construct, meant to re-justify the United State's support for some of its more embarrassing client states, while restructuring the precise way in which that support was provided.

Keywords: Israel; South Africa; Palestine; nuclear; pariah; foreign relations; arms trade; embargo; apartheid; occupation; United States of America; United Nations; Cold War; International Law.

Sleutelwoorde: Israel; Suid-Afrika; kernfisies; paria; buitelandse verhoudinge; wapenhandel; verbod; apartheid; besetting; Verenigde State van Amerika; Verenigde Nasies; Koue Oorlog; Internasionale Reg.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 6 November 1986, Binyamin Netanyahu, then Israel's ambassador to the UN, addressed the General Assembly, thundering: "For the Jewish people, Apartheid is the ultimate abomination. It is an expression of the cruellest inhumanity. Israel will

1 Post-doctoral Fellow, Department of History, University of the Free State. E-mail: Yalsheh@gmail.com

do everything possible to eliminate this odious system."[2] By the time Netanyahu delivered this statement, Israel had been exporting arms, arms production know-how, counter-insurgency, anti-riot tactics and training modules to South Africa for over ten years.[3] It would in fact continue to do so until 1994, when the newly elected ANC-led administration preferred to do its arms-shopping elsewhere.[4] On 4 November 1977 the Security Council of the UN imposed a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa,[5] and on 16 September 1987 Israel itself joined the rest of the international community by officially imposing far-reaching sanctions on any ties with the white-ruled country.[6] To put it bluntly, Israel continued to willingly provide South Africa with arms for as long as South Africa was willing to buy them from Israel. It thus seems Israel did not, in fact, "do everything possible to eliminate this odious system". Certainly, Israel was hardly alone in this respect: at no point was it South Africa's sole arms supplier.[7] One may well wonder, for example, whether the widespread violations of the Arab Oil Producers' decision to impose an oil embargo against South Africa in 1973 (joined by Iran in 1979 and by the General Assembly on 20 November 1987) were not far more cardinal to literally fuelling the survival of that regime.[8]

Nevertheless, one cannot simply excuse Israel's failure to comply with the struggle against apartheid by pointing out that "others were doing it as well", so to

2 Quoted by Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The unspoken alliance: Israel's secret alliance with apartheid South Africa* (New York, 2010), pp. 165-166.

3 As early as 14 December 1973, the General Assembly condemned in its resolution 3151G (XXVIII) "the unholy alliance between…South African racism… and Israeli Imperialism", in 1984 James Adams, a journalist working for the *Sunday Times*, published *The unnatural alliance* (London, 1984), exposing the Israeli-South African military cooperation. During the second half of the 1980s Israel's failure to comply with the arms embargo against South Africa was referred to in various UN bodies, probably more than any other state that was doing so. See, for example, the report of the *International Conference on the Alliance Between South Africa and Israel, Vienna, 11-13 July 1983*, New York, 1983). Polakow-Suransky's 2010 *The unspoken alliance* mentioned above is currently the most comprehensive account of this relationship.

4 With regard to the ANC's post-1994 arms deals and the mammoth scandal that developed, see Andrew Feinstein, *After the part: Corruption, the ANC and South Africa's uncertain future* (New York, 2009); Terry Crawford-Browne, "The arms deal scandal", *Review of African Political Economy* 31(100), 2004, pp. 329-342.

5 UN Doc. S/RES/418 – 4 November 1977.

6 For the document stating the sanctions, see Meron Medzini (ed.), *Israel's foreign relations: Selected documents 1984-1988*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 696.

7 General Assembly resolution 44/27 of 22 November 1989 (UN Doc. A/RES/44/27 I) deplores Israel, Chile and the Federal Republic of Germany for violating the embargo. The involvement of other states is also described in a study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri): Signe Landgren, *Embargo disimplemented: South Africa's military industry* (Oxford, 1988).

8 UN Doc. A/RES/42/23 A. See "Fueling Apartheid", *Notes and Documents: United Nations Centre Against Apartheid* 13/80; African National Congress of South Africa (New York, 1980); "Arabs and Africans: The common struggle against Apartheid", *Notes and Documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 14/82 (New York, 1982).

speak. After all, as Shimon Peres, one of Israeli's leading politicians and current President shamelessly declared: "A Jew who accepts apartheid ceases to be a Jew."[9] Indeed, this attitude could very well be expected of the Jewish people, first and foremost as they themselves repeatedly state that they expect themselves to be at the very forefront of the struggle against apartheid and all other regimes of similar nature. The reason for such exceptional expectations is well-known. The memory of the Holocaust seems to demand, at least in principle, that racism and race-based politics, not to mention the perpetration of genocide or the denial of such acts, would never be tolerated.[10] Since the 1960s the memory of the Holocaust became increasingly entrenched in Israeli collective memory, and is by now practically the very cornerstone of Zionist ideology.[11] Given all that, Israel should have been vehemently averse to apartheid. Furthermore, the fact that the South African National Party was notorious (somewhat exaggeratingly, one might add)[12] for its sympathy towards Nazi Germany during the Second World War, and that several of its leading members were honestly (as opposed to merely instrumentally) enthusiastic about National-Socialist ideals and political culture,[13] should have made it even more likely for Israel to mobilize against, rather than for, apartheid South Africa.

This is not what happened, however. To the extent that Israel did standout with regard to the international struggle against apartheid, it also stood out for its lingering reluctance to honestly take part in that struggle. The cold, hard facts are that Israel did not hesitate to violate UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting the export of armaments, military technology and nuclear technology to apartheid South Africa.[14] As mentioned, some members of the Israeli military, political and

9 Quoted by Polakow-Suransky, p. 207.

10 See in this regard Yair Auron's works: *Denial: Israel and the Armenian genocide* (Tel Aviv, 2005) [in Hebrew]; *The pain of knowledge: Holocaust and genocide issues in education* (New Brunswick, 2005); *Israeli identities: The attitudes of Israeli students, Jews and Arabs, to their peoplehood, religiosity and their state, and their attitudes to the Holocaust and the Naqba* (Tel Aviv, 2010) [in Hebrew].

11 See, for example, Edith Zartal's discussion in *Israel's Holocaust and the politics of nationhood* (Cambridge, 2005). For a more conservative perspective, see Yair Auron,"The Holocaust: Main factor in Jewish-Israeli identity," in Erik H Cohen (ed.), *Jewish identity, values and leisure* (Tel Aviv, 2008), pp. 153-160.

12 See David Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid* (Charlottesville, 2009), p.17.

13 With regard to Nazi sympathies among leaders of the Afrikaner National Party in the first half of the 1940s, see A Kuma 'N'dumbe, "Relations between Nazi Germany and South Africa", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 12/76 (New York, 1976); see also Polakov-Suransky, pp. 13-21.

14 Security Council resolution 181 of 7 August 1963 –UN Doc. S/RES/18; Security Council resolution 191, 18 June 1964 – UN Doc. S/RES/191; Security Council resolution 282, 23 July 1970 – UN Doc. S/RES/282; Security Council resolution 418, 4 November 1977– UN Doc. S/RES/418; Security Council resolution 591, 28 November 1986.

economic élite were sympathetic to Afrikaner Nationalism and the policies carried out in its name. In 1986, Israeli intelligence estimated that South Africa's white rule would not collapse for at least another twenty to thirty years.[15] Reassured by such predictions regarding the stable political future of their clients (some even venture to say allies), the Israeli defence establishment was indifferent to what the survival of the apartheid regime meant for the majority of its governed population.

But being morally scandalized by these facts is a poor substitute for proper historical analysis of the relationship between Israel and South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. At its crude stand most simplistic version, constructing the story of this relationship around such moral outrage is but a sterile act of shaming.[16] But even in less righteous versions, such a story presents yet another sad but trivial example of the strictly declaratory nature of the international humanitarian regime of the Cold War era.[17] Discussing Israel's ties with apartheid South Africa in moralizing terms is of limited explanatory value for the historian. Doing so means uncritically accepting universal human rights discourse, without paying due attention to the exact context of its emergence and its specific effects.

As rightfully enraged as one might be regarding Israel's concealed support of the South African apartheid regime, the relationship between the two countries should not be explained away as nothing but the shameful alliance of the damned. Keeping in mind that there is no such thing as a criminal state but only criminal individuals, one must confront the fact that the history of states' international delinquency is not simply the history of insufficient enforcement. In this regard, the historian should adopt a more functionalist approach, asking who benefit from making things appear this way, and how. For example, what was the function of international norms that were not enforced? What was the function of the concept of pariah states?

The current study discusses five explanations for the specific Israeli-South African relationship during the 1970s and 1980s:

- *The Industrial-Military Complex Explanation*, arguing that both the Israeli and South African defence establishments and arms industries had much to gain from such a relationship, and enough political influence to ensure that this would indeed happen.
- *The Nuclear Alliance Explanation*, arguing that it was in Israel and South Africa's national interest to forge a nuclear consortium that would enable

15 Polakow-Suransky, p.192, based on an interview he held with Yossi Beilin, former Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General.

16 See, for example, Emilie M Hafner-Burton, "Sticks and stones: Naming and shaming the human rights enforcement problem", *International Organization* 62(4), 2008, pp. 689-716.

17 See Jack Donnelly's classical typology of international humanitarian regimes in *Universal human rights in theory and practice* (Ithaca, 2003), especially pp. 127-154.

them to attain and further develop significant nuclear capacities, conceived by both states as the ultimate means for guaranteeing the survival of their chronically-contested regimes.

- *The Ideological Affinities / Similar Regime-Type Explanation*, arguing that, while Israel was unable or in any case reluctant to publicly admit it, it was not averse to the South African regime of separate development, mostly because, ever since 1967, it was on a course of constructing its own version of such a regime.
- *The Pariah States Alliance Explanation*, arguing that Israel and South Africa shared the same international status of pariah states, hence having no other states they could befriend, and in any case nothing to lose from collaborating with each other.
- *The Politics of International Pariah-Making Explanation*, arguing that the concept of the pariah state – which emerged in 1977 and disappeared by the end of the 1980s – was not a naïve scholarly attempt to conceptualize a new type of international actor, but rather an ideological construct, meant to re-justify the United State's support for some of its more embarrassing client states, while restructuring the precise way in which that support was provided.

2. THE INDUSTRIAL-MILITARY COMPLEX EXPLANATION

On 6 October 1986, the United States' Congress passed the Anti-Apartheid Act, which effectively meant that Israel had to end its highly lucrative ties with South Africa, or at least to go to considerable length to make it seem as if these ties ended.[18] This was no insignificant matter, as by 1979 South Africa became Israel's single biggest client for arms and military knowledge, purchasing no less than 35% of Israel's military exports.[19] While in 1971 Israel exported 70 million US$ worth of arms, by 1986 its arms industry accounted for 1,5 billion US$ of exports.[20] In 1985 20% of Israel's total industrial exports revenue came from South Africa.[21] To make things even worse, those were not easy days for the Israeli economy. After inflation had reached an annual rate of over 445% by 1984 (compared with 38% in 1976),

18 See the text of the comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in the US Library of Congress website,<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d099>H.R.4868>, accessed 12 March 2012.

19 Polakow-Suransky, p.132, quoting Peter L Bunce, "The growth of South Africa's defence industry and its Israeli connection", *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 129(2), 1984, p. 44.

20 See S Klieman, *Israel's global reach: Arms sales as diplomacy* (Oxford, 1985); Stewart Reiser, *The Israeli Arms Industry: Foreign policy, arms transfers and military doctrine of a small state* (New York, 1989).

21 As stated by Yitzhak Rabin, then Israeli Minister of Defence, in the Knesset, 11 October 1986.

while its external public debt exceeded its annual GDP for the first time, Israel embarked on an ambitious economic stabilization plan. The almost promethean implementation (in political terms) of this plan marked Israel's transition to neo-liberalism (for more on this, see section 4). Among other measures, the plan included massive cutbacks to the public sector and a significant tax increase.[22] Put bluntly, in 1986 Israel was hardly in an ideal position to consider ending its arms exports to South Africa. As appalled and scandalized by the oppressive and racist nature of that regime as the Israeli public might have been, it was not willing to make actual economic sacrifices or endure economic hardship in order to help end apartheid. Conveniently enough, the Israeli government decided this was indeed the case, and that it should shield the public from directly confronting such a dilemma.

Massive arms exports were the only way Israel could allow its sizable domestic arms industry to provide tens of thousands of jobs, helping Israel maintain a better balance of international payments. Since the mid-1970s, such a domestic industry was deemed necessary in order to enable Israel to significantly reduce its dependence on arms imports from countries such as the US or France (see section 3). The less Israel relied on imported arms, the less political leverage such exporting states would have on its chronically controversial policies. Exporting its arms surpluses did not only make these industries more viable economically, but also allowed for a more frequent upgrading of the IDF's (Israel Defence Forces) existing arms and ammunition. Israel was thus able to export outdated yet functional weapons systems to whomever was able to pay. This was one of the only ways Israel could make friends with foreign countries. The arms industry quickly became a leading engine in Israel's economy during the 1970s and 1980s, building on Israel's post-1967 image as a military expert.[23]

On the South African side of the relationship one finds a strikingly similar process. As the growing international sanctions continually limited South Africa's ability to purchase arms abroad, it invested immensely in building its own arms industry. From spending no more than R30 million on (mostly imported) arms in 1966, by 1980 South Africa was spending R600 million on arms, most of which was locally produced. By 1988 South Africa was exporting R1,8 billion worth of arms, becoming one of the top ten arms exporters in the world. With a turnover of R3 billion and approximately 90 000 employees, Armscor (the Armaments Corporation of South Africa Ltd, founded 1 April 1977) became South Africa's

22 See Michael Bruno and Leora (Rubin) Meridor, "The costly transition from stabilization to sustainable growth: Israel's case", in Michael Bruno and Leora (Rubin) Meridor (eds.), *Lessons of economic stabilization and its aftermath* (Cambridge, 1991); Daniel Maman and Zeev Rosenhek, *The Israeli Central Bank: Political economy, global logics and local actors* (London, 2011).

23 See Aharon Klieman, *Double edged sword: Israel defense exports* (Tel Aviv, 1992) [in Hebrew]; Benjamin Beit Halachmi, *The Israeli connection: Who Israel arms and why* (London, 1987).

fourth employer in order of size.[24] During the 1970s and 1980s Armscor had become a heavyweight organization, capable of promoting its interests in a regime for which defence expenditure was top priority.

As the foregoing clearly shows, the industrial-military complex explanation suggests that the relationship between South Africa and Israel during the 1970s and 1980s was in the interest of both states' armed forces, defence ministries and armaments industries. Since the combined political influence of those industrial-military complexes far exceeded the political influence of groups that had some interest in opposing this relationship, the ties between the two states grew stronger. According to this explanation, the two states should not be regarded as unitary actors but as assemblages of sub-state organizations and individuals who formed coalitions of interests. Those coalitions of interests opposed and sidelined other coalitions of sub-state organizations and individuals that happened to promote alternative or even contrary interests.

The term "industrial-military complex" refers, ever since American President Eisenhower's famous 1961 speech,[25] to a coalition of powerful groups and bodies that share economic, institutional or political interests in intensifying defence expenditure, along with their collieries: arms races, arms trades and, of course, occasional armed conflicts.[26] At its core, the concept is not radical. After all, few observers would deny that an industrial-military complex is a fitting title for one of the several powerful interest groups operating in post-World War I nation-states. Every modern country that maintained a military bureaucracy and defence industry also effectively sustained what may be termed a military-industrial complex, in the sense that representatives of the military bureaucracy and the defence industry naturally seek to maximize their joint interests. In this respect, neither Israel nor South Africa constitute a noteworthy exception.[27]

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24 André Wessels, "The United Nations arms embargo against South Africa 1977-1994," *War & Society* 29(2), 2010, p. 148.

25 The term was first suggested by CW Mills in his classic work *The power élite* (Oxford, 1956), but it was Eisenhower's use of the term that constituted it as a key concept. For the text of Eisenhower's speech, see <http://www.h-net.org/~hst306/documents/indust.html>, accessed 12 March 2012. For the historical context of the speech, see Robert Griffith, "Dwight D Eisenhower and the corporate Commonwealth", *The American Historical Review* 87(1), 1982, pp. 87-122.

26 Classic works on the concept and theory of the industrial-military complex include FJ Cook, *The warfare state* (New York, 1962); SC Sarkesian (ed.), *The military industrial complex: a reassessment* (Los Angeles, 1979), and especially CC Moskos, "The military industrial complex: Theoretical antecedents and conceptual contradictions", pp. 3-24.

27 With regard to the South African industrial-military complex, see Ahmad Barakat, "South Africa's military establishment", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 25/72 (New York, 1972); Ann W Seidman and Neva Makgetla, "Transnational corporations and the South African military-industrial complex", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 24/79 (New York, 1979). With regard to the Israeli industrial-military complex, see Alex Mintz, "The military-industrial complex: American concepts and Israeli realities", *The*

However, the effective power held by such a complex *vis-à-vis* other interest groups in a given nation-state varied considerably over the course of the twentieth century and, of course, between one state and another (its influence in the USA is not comparable to that of Canada, for example). Hence the more accurate account is that, from the early 1970s to the end of the 1980s, both Israel and South Africa were examples of nation-states in which the industrial-military complex could not be kept in place, by being effectively counter-balanced by other sectors within or outside those states. Arguably, these complexes were so overly-powerful that they were able to transcend the national interests of both countries in favour of what were, in the end of the day, sectorial, short-term interests of the organizations and individuals making up those complexes. We should note, however, that the industrial-military complex explanation necessarily assumes that there are national interests that can be objectively assessed. Without pointing out the way in which the industrial-military complex is able to promote its own sectorial interests at the expense of the nation's, this explanation does nothing more than trivially point out that Israel's ties with South Africa were in the interest of certain sectors within both states. This explanation only becomes non-trivial once it is able to somehow demonstrate that these sectors were structurally capable of effectively forcing those ties on both states against what should have been their better judgment, that is, against their true national interest. In other words, it has to be further demonstrated that Israel let its state-owned arms-industries overdevelop to the point in which it could no longer afford, either economically or politically, to seriously review its arms-trade policies. With regard to South Africa, the damage was arguably even greater. As André Wessels grimly explains:

> "The high cost relating to the clandestine acquisition of arms (or spare parts) overseas, and to the local development and manufacture of arms, placed further strain on the South African economy, which was already under pressure owing to oil and other economic sanctions. The spiral of increasing costs became a vicious cycle. As the international pressure on the apartheid state intensified, the NP and its (mainly white Afrikaans-speaking) supporters increasingly felt that they were under siege, and saw themselves as the victims of a communistic and liberal 'total onslaught'– and the perceived need for armaments increased. But buying or developing and manufacturing arms and ammunition continually became more expensive, diverting funds away from where they were desperately needed; for example, for the provision of adequate housing, education, medical and other social services to the majority of black people in the country. The neglect of these people led to increased protests and later to sabotage and other forms of violence at the home front, aggravating the culture of fear and concomitant insecurity in the white communities, which in turn led to an increasing demand for more security, and so on."[28]

Journal of Conflict Resolution 29(4), 1985, pp. 623-639; Yossi Perri, *Between bullets and ballots – the Israeli Army in politics* (Cambridge, 1983).

28 Wessels, p. 153.

3. THE NUCLEAR ALLIANCE EXPLANATION

In contrast to the industrial-military complex explanation, the nuclear alliance explanation suggests that the Israeli-South African relationship was well within the interest of both regimes, and in no way merely the working of over-influential self-serving interest groups. This explanation points out that this relationship enabled both states to develop and advance their nuclear capabilities, which were meant to serve as the ultimate guarantee for the survival of their regimes.

By June 1967 Israel had already crossed the nuclear threshold.[29] Yet it was only in 1973, during the October Yom Kippur War, that its nuclear capabilities unveiled their strategic value. The US government, refusing to re-supply Israel, which feared immanent defeat, with weapons during the opening days of the war, changed its position overnight, organizing an airlift of over twenty tons.[30] It is increasingly argued that this change of mind was due to the US government's preference to help the Israelis win by means of conventional weapons, rather than risk a nuclear war that would inevitably result from Israeli use (or even the mere public threat of using) nuclear arms.[31] In other words, Israel did not need nuclear capabilities in order to deter against external interventions: it needed them in order to deter against the dangers of non-intervention.[32] This lesson, as Sasha Polakow-Suransky succinctly puts it, "was not lost on the South Africans".[33]

Polakow-Suransky's revealing account of the nuclear dimensions of the Israeli-South African relationship – starting with Israel's import of uranium from South Africa during the 1960s, via the two states' shared nuclear test in 1979, up until Mr. FW de Klerk's public confession in March 1993 that South Africa indeed possessed nuclear bombs (dismantled in 1990) – allows one to see for the first time the entire relationship in detail.[34] In order to understand the full meaning of this

29 Avner Cohen, "Crossing the threshold: the untold nuclear dimension of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and its contemporary lessons", *Arms Control Today* 37(5), 2007, pp. 12-16.

30 Josef Ben-Meir, *The politics of military aid – the US airlift to Israel* (New York, 1980); Henri Kissinger, *Crisis – the anatomy of two major foreign policy crises* (New York, 2004), pp. 143-178.

31 See in this regard Galia Golan, *Yom Kippur and after: the Soviet Union and the Middle East crisis* (Cambridge, 1977); Foy D Kohler, Leon Goure, Mose L Harvey (eds.), *The Soviet Union and the October 1973 Middle East War: the implications for détente* (Coral Gables, 1974).

32 As indeed argued by Richard K Betts in "Paranoids, pygmies, pariahs & nonproliferation", *Foreign Policy* 26, 1977, p. 158.

33 Polakow-Suransky, p. 71.

34 Other available accounts on this issue are Peter Hounam and Steve Mcquillan, *The Mini-Nuke conspiracy* (London, 1995); Ronald Walters, "South Africa's nuclear build-up and its implications", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 29/78 (New York, 1978); Bernard Boudouresque, "France's role in South Africa's nuclear build-up", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 33/78 (New York, 1978); Abdul S Minty, "South Africa's military and nuclear build-up", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 41/78 (New York, 1978); David Haslam, "The financing of South Africa's

nuclear alliance, it should be noted that nuclear capabilities were acknowledged by the mid-1970s as the ultimate means for ensuring that any regime enjoying them would never be truly left alone to survive on nothing but its own autarchic military means. Being a member of the nuclear club meant that a country was a power to be reckoned with: one of those states that could be kept above overly intrusive humanitarian scrutiny, that is, a seriously sovereign state.

The fact that some states are exposed to humanitarian scrutiny of their internal affairs, while others are not, dates back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when great powers allowed themselves to intervene in the domestic affairs of Eastern and Southern European states, as well as in those of the Ottoman Empire, under the pretence of protecting the rights of minority populations within those states.[35] This fundamental inequality was in fact institutionalized in the interwar years, when the international protection of minorities' rights, in the form of the notoriously counter-effective minorities treaties, was imposed only on Eastern, Central and Southern European states.[36] As early as 1950, the former Nazi jurist and political theorist, Carl Schmitt, analyzed the hidden imperial functions of international law and institutions.[37] As Schmitt plainly argued, it was not the content of international conventions, charters and treaties that mattered most, but the unwritten rules that determined their enforceability.

By the last third of the twentieth century, as both Israel and South Africa understood, nuclear capabilities became a key variable with regard to the question of how internally sovereign a state was. That said, one must nevertheless note that most states at the time (as is still the case) did not need to ensure their internal sovereignty by means of nuclear deterrents. Most states were not in need of such extreme measures in order to hold off external interventions, for the simple reason they were essentially and incontestably legitimate. Were Israel and South Africa cooperating in order to fortify their stand against international de-legitimisation, as part of a revisionist attempt to establish an alternative regime of international legitimisation? Simply put, did they regard each other to be perfectly legitimate states?

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nuclear program", *Notes and documents: United Nations Centre against Apartheid* 17/81 (New York, 1981).

35 See Carole Fink's seminal study *Defending the rights of others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International minority protection*, 1878-1938 (Cambridge, 2006).

36 See Pablo De Azcarate's analysis in his *League of Nations and national minorities- an experiment* (Washington, 1945).

37 Carl Schmitt, *The nomos of the earth* (New York, 2006).

4. THE IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITIES/SIMILAR REGIME-TYPE EXPLANATION

According to this fourth explanation, Israel willingly violated the 1977 Security Council mandatory embargo against South Africa because, regardless of what it may have hypocritically stated in public, it did not regard the apartheid regime ideologically abhorrent. In fact, this explanation suggests Israel *could* not regard the apartheid regime unacceptable without delegitimising its own *de facto* regime.

The distinction between Israel's *de facto* regime as opposed to its *de jure* one was suggested in a recent controversial work by two radical Israeli political thinkers.[38] Arguably, the state of Israel has been able to portray itself as a liberal democracy despite the fact that since June 1967 it governs around two million Palestinians whose political and civil rights are systematically violated, by framing the situation as transitional in essence.[39] Once this situation is acknowledged as a permanent "state of exception",[40] however, Israel may be regarded as having an informal regime that is fundamentally different from its formal one.[41] Ever since the 1990s there have been a growing number of theoretical works framing the situation in Israel-Palestine since 1967 as a case of apartheid similar to the South African regime.[42] To be sure, critics of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been equating the two regimes as early as the 1970s. However, it seems that up until the 1990s this was mostly intended as a rhetorical means ("Israel is as bad as Apartheid South Africa"), rather than a serious theoretical attempt to

38 Ariela Azulai and Adi Ophir, *This regime that is not one: Occupation and democracy between the Jordan and the sea* (Tel Aviv, 2008) – [in Hebrew].

39 Yehouda Shenhav, *The time of the green line: Towards a Jewish political thought* (Tel Aviv, 2010) – [in Hebrew].

40 Yehouda Shenhav, Christoph Schmidt and Shimshon Zelniker, *State of exception and state of emergency* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 2009) – [in Hebrew].

41 The Freedom House Index symptomatically analyzes Israel and the occupied territories separately, as if these were two distinct political entities, the one fairly democratic the other not. See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/israel>, accessed 12 March 2012.

42 The earliest scholarly work that tries to put forward this argument is probably George Jabbour, *Settler colonialism in Southern Africa and the Middle East* (Khartoum, 1970); Uri Davis, *Israel an Apartheid state* (London,1987); Mark Marshall, "Rethinking the Palestine question: The Apartheid paradigm", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25(1), 1995, pp. 15-22; Raef Zreik, "Palestine apartheid and the rights discourse", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34(1), 2004, pp. 68-80; Ilan Pappe, *Peoples apart: Israel, South Africa and the Apartheid question* (London, 2012); Marwan Bishara, *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid: Occupation, terrorism and the future* (London, 2003); Oren Yiftachel, "Neither two states nor one: The disengagement and 'creeping Apartheid' in Israel/Palestine", *The Arab World Geographer* 8(3), 2005 pp. 125-129; Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: possibilities for the struggle within* (London, 2004); Amneh Badran, *Zionist Israel and Apartheid South Africa: Civil society and peace building in ethnic-national states* (London, 2009); Ian Urbina, "The analogy to apartheid", *Middle East Report* 223, 2002, pp. 58-64.

suggest that Israel's policy may fall under the 1973 International Convention on the suppression and punishment of the crime of apartheid.[43]

Since the effective collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Israel's centre and moderate Left (also known as the Zionist Left, as opposed to the non-Zionist or radical Left) began to argue that, should the current situation continue, Israel will transform into an apartheid state.[44] Others have suggested that Israel had entered the route to apartheid in 1977, when the Likud Party took power and began rebuilding a new hegemony in Israeli society:

> "The ideological prescription provided by Revionist Zionism and Afrikaner Nationalism was the same: use military force in order to ensure national survival. And as Likud's more militant platform moved from the political wilderness into the main stream in Israel, this shared worldview served as the ideological glue for the Israeli-South African Alliance."[45]

As suggestive as this coincidence of dates is –1977 being both the year of the Security Council resolution on mandatory embargo on South Africa, and the Likud Party's rise to power in Israel – the overall argument seems flawed. While the Israeli Labour Party, who lost the 1977 elections, would surely appreciate the attempt to portray its launching of the alliance with South Africa in the early 1970s, at a time the Labour's hegemony still seemed invincible, as purely motivated by material and strategic reasons, as opposed to the Likud's ideological motivations, this was not really the case.[46] By 1977, the difference between the Labour Party's socialist Zionism and the Likud's revisionist Zionism had almost disappeared, especially with regard to the so-called "ethno-nationalist" dimensions of Zionism. The core meaning of the 1977 shift of power lay in the turn to neo-liberalism as Israel's hegemonic governmental paradigm.[47] Interestingly enough, South Africa's turn to neo-liberalism had to wait till the end of white rule.[48] In this regard, one may even wonder if Israel and South Africa did not increasingly become ideologically different from 1977 onwards, as Israel enthusiastically imitated Thatcher and

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43 See the text of the convention in General Assembly, resolution 3068 of 30 November 1973 - UN Doc. A/RES/3068 (XXVIII).

44 This argument was provocatively put forward in Jimmy Carter's 2006 book *Palestine: Peace not apartheid* (New York, 2006). At the same time, politicians of the Centre Kadima Party and the centre-left Labour Party have begun publically stating that the alternative Israel is facing either a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza or an apartheid state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

45 Polakow-Suransky, p. 110.

46 *Ibid*.

47 See Dani Filc's analysis in *The political right in Israel: The many faces of Jewish populism* (London, 2010).

48 Paul Williams and Ian Taylor, "Neoliberalism and the political economy of the 'New' South Africa", *New Political Economy* 5(1), pp. 21-40; Patrick Bond, *Elite transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London, 2000).

Reagan's neo-liberal revolutions, while South Africa preserved its Keynesian for–whites-only welfare state.

Be that as it may, the core problem with this explanation is that the kind of relationship that existed between Israel and South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s does not require ideological similarities or sympathies. Ideological affinities may explain relationships in which at least one side is not gaining anything or is even damaged, yet they are meaningless, or at most a contingent and in essential characteristic, when that relationship is clearly and obviously beneficial for all sides. Given that the relationship in question was carefully concealed, and that Israel was publicly condemning apartheid (as the National Party itself began to do since the mid-1980s), the two states were obviously not joining forces in order to advocate the merits or legitimacy of their allegedly similar regime-types, nor were they parading their regimes as a "light onto the nations" (as Israel did with regard to its developmental-state model of the 1950s and 1960s).[49] In fact, while certain identifications with the biblical people of Israel played a significant role in Afrikaner Nationalism,[50] post-1967 Zionism was far too invested in notions of Jewish uniqueness and singularity to identify with other states.

Given all this, why does one nonetheless come across this explanation? The first reason seems to be that by arguing Israel was ideologically sympathetic to the apartheid regime, one can justify a special focus on the Israeli-South African relationship, as opposed to offering a global analysis of the disimplementation of the embargo on South Africa.[51] The second reason seems to be that the attempt to conceptualise the regime that *de facto* existed in Israel-Palestine since 1967 (or even 1948) *vis-à-vis* the South African apartheid regime, with all the legal and political resources such conceptualisation might mobilize, is a far more lucrative topic than the trivialities of international humanitarian regimes and their frustrating ineffectiveness. This being a noteworthy phenomenon, given that any legal and political resource that the association of Israel with the international crime of apartheid could bring about, will strictly depend on the ability to understand the dynamics of international sanctions and the question of their historical ineffectiveness. In this regard, suggesting that the reason states – or at least certain states – violate international sanctions is because those states are in fact (though secretly) ideologically sympathetic towards the targeted regimes.

49 With regard to Africa, see Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: the problematic friendship* (London, 1992); Samuel Decalo, *Israel and Africa: Forty years 1956-1996* (Gainesville, 1998).

50 This being a common feature of nationalist movements. See Anthony D Smith, *Chosen peoples: The sacred sources of national identity* (Oxford, 2004).

51 Such as SIPRI's 1989 research, Landgren.

5. THE PARIAH STATES ALLIANCE EXPLANATION

Unlike the previous explanation, this explanation does not argue that Israel and South Africa were ideologically alike or that their respective regimes were constructed around similar principles in any significant way. Instead, this explanation is premised upon claiming that the two states were of the same international status, i.e. pariah states.[52] In 1981, Robert E Harkavi used the term "pariah state," arguing that: "Some nations have been deemed deserving of such an appellation because of their precarious diplomatic isolation, the absence of assured, credible security support or political moorings within big-power alliance structures, and because they have become the targets of obsessive and unrelenting opprobrium and censure within international forums such as the United Nations."[53]

Being pariah states, both Israel and South Africa were simply not in a position to choose who they trade with. Moreover, given that they already were pariahs, what had they to lose? In this regard, the relationship between the two should not be explained from the inside, as the first three explanations suggest (the interest of over-powerful industrial-military complexes; a national interest in attaining nuclear capabilities; ideological affinities) but from the outside, i.e. in terms of the external situation or structural position in which those states found themselves during the 1970s and 1980s. South Africa and Israel did not choose to cooperate as much as they were driven to do so, once they had been ostracized by the international community. This appears to be well exemplified by the fact that, as of 1972, Israel gradually began taking the place previously held by France and Italy as South Africa's main arms supplier,[54] as well as by the fact that in the mid-1960s Israel had replaced the US and the UK as South Africa's dependent uranium buyer.[55]

As pariahs, neither Israel nor South Africa could manipulate or betray each other. Israel had to market its surplus arms production to someone, and did not have too many willing and trustworthy paying customers, just as South Africa had to buy arms from someone, and did not have too many willing, trustworthy

52 Both South Africa and Israel are the two immediate examples given by all attempts to conceptualize the notion of a pariah state. Robert E Harkavi, "The Pariah State syndrome", *Orbits* 21(1), 1977, pp. 623-649; Richard K Betts, "Paranoids, pygmies pariah and non-proliferation", *Foreign Policy* 26, 1977 pp. 157-183; Peter Vale, "South Africa as a pariah international state", *International Affairs Bulletin* 1(3), 1977, pp. 121-141; Efraim Inbar, "The emergence of pariah states in world politics: the isolation of Israel", *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 15(1), 1983/4, pp. 55-83; Deon Geldenhuys, "International isolation: toward a framework for analysis", *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 10(2), 1988, pp. 1-25; Deon Geldenhuys, *Isolated states – a comparative analysis* (Johannesburg, 1990).

53 Robert E Harkavi, "Pariah states and nuclear proliferation," *International Organization* 35(1), 1981, p. 135.

54 Landgren, p. 229.

55 Polakow-Suransky, p. 43.

sellers. Mutually lacking any significant political leverage on each other, and similarly-positioned as nation-states of peoples that "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations",[56] how could Israel and South Africa *not* form an alliance?

But did Israel and South Africa really share the same international status in the 1970s and 1980s? In terms of diplomatic relations, the difference appears fairly obvious. By 1988, Israel had 81 diplomatic missions abroad, while South Africa had only 29. Forty four states had diplomatic missions in Israel, while only 23 had such a mission in South Africa. Between 1977 and 1988 Israel had been visited, in some cases more than once, by the leaders of Egypt, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, the US, Swaziland, Fiji, Luxemburg, Peru, Thailand, France, Liberia, West Germany, Zaire, Britain, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Panama, Honduras and Italy, while South Africa was visited only by the leaders of Taiwan and Lesotho.[57]

The difference was even more distinct with regard to the economic sphere. Since prior to the inception of Israel in 1948, an Arab boycott against the Jewish settlement in Palestine and later the state of Israel had been in place.[58] While the boycott cannot simply be excused as non-effective, it was not able to damage the Israeli economy in any significant way. During the 1970s and 1980s Israel maintained commercial relations with a wide range of Western, communist and third-world countries – a far wider and denser network than its diplomatic one.[59] With regard to South Africa, the picture was, of course, quite different. By 1988 more than 100 states applied some sort of a trade sanction against the country, practically affecting all of its exporting sectors.[60] Unlike Israel, South Africa's economic ostracism was more extensive than its diplomatic one, as even states that maintained some degree of diplomatic relations with it still took part in the economic sanctions. In fact, by the late 1980s South Africa had become the single most ostracized, sanctioned and universally condemned regime in the history of the international community, and the paradigmatic pariah state. Israel, on the other hand, may have seemed to some, by the end of the 1980s, as practically second in line to this title,[61] yet was still by every relevant criterion, qualitatively (rather than merely quantitatively) different from South Africa.

One may argue that, given Israel's growing notoriety in the international sphere, close ties with South Africa were the last thing that a country could afford.

56 Numbers, 23:9.
57 Geldenhuys, pp. 150, 159, 169, 219, 227.
58 See Gil Feiler, *From boycott to economic cooperation: The political economy of the Arab boycott of Israel* (London, 1998).
59 Geldenhuys, p. 316.
60 *Ibid*., p. 354.
61 As was soon discovered, this was not the case. Iraq took the title from South Africa by August 1990, and held it up to 2003.

One could argue that, rather than having nothing to lose, Israel had everything to lose: it risked transforming its pariah-image into an actual state of pariahtude, which, as South Africa knew all too well, was something significantly different. Given how depended Israel has always been on foreign trade and capital investments, its ability to survive comprehensive economic sanctioning was doubtful at best. In this regard, one may even suggest asking what might explain Israel's evident willingness to risk its international status in such a way. What guarantees had Israel had that its relationship with South Africa would not overly-delegitimize its already chronically contested regime? How could it determine that this relationship would not be transformed into a real alliance of pariah states?

6. THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL PARIAH-MAKING EXPLANATION

In view of the abovementioned doubts regarding the value of the pariah states alliance, one may wonder whether the concept of the pariah state is of any analytic value at all. After all, why was the term only used, during the 1970s and 1980s, with respect to right-wing governments of pro-western orientation that denied full political rights from at least some parts of their respective populations (most commonly: South Africa, Israel, Taiwan, Chile and South Korea)? Why were there no pariah states among the Eastern Bloc or the Non-Aligned states? And why was the concept replaced by that of "rough states" since the 1990s?

Those who conceptualized the term pariah state or tried to further elaborate on it had been trying to detract attention from this noteworthy coincidence by retrospectively identifying certain historical states and regimes as earlier examples. It was thus suggested that the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1922, the Weimar Republic between 1918 and 1926, Fascist Italy since 1935, Franco's Spain after 1945, the People's Republic of China until the 1960s, and Rhodesia (1965-1980) were all examples of pariah states.[62] Yet none of these examples, bracketing Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) for the moment, seems very convincing. With regard to Rhodesia, since it had never been recognized as a sovereign state, the core tension of the concept of a pariah state – the questionable use of sanctions as a means for intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign state – is lost. More than a pariah state, Rhodesia was a *de facto* state.[63]

A more revealing perspective on the emergence of the category of pariah state may be attained by noting that it emerged in the context of analyzing nuclear

62 See Geldenhuys, pp. 28-86; Harkavy, "Pariah states and nuclear proliferation" and "The pariah state syndrome".

63 On the concept of *de facto* states, see Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann and Henry Srebrnik (eds.), *De facto states – the quest for recognition* (London, 2003).

proliferation dynamics from the second half of the 1970s onwards. In 1977 Richard K Betts published a rather symptomatic article in *Foreign Policy* titled "Paranoid, pygmies, pariahs and non-proliferation".[64] Later works dedicated to a more detailed conceptualization of the pariah state as a theoretically distinct international actor pointed out the typology suggested in Betts' article as a pioneering use of the term.[65] Yet this article did more than merely christen this alleged kind of international actor (which others tried to name "outcast state" or "isolated state"). It also provides us with the exact political context from which the notion of the pariah state originated.

Betts suggested a reconsideration of the way the US dealt with the nuclear proliferation problem, arguing that, in order to prevent states from developing nuclear capabilities, one should understand why they are politically motivated to do so –seeing as certain states (such as Germany, Italy or Japan) do not seek to develop such capabilities, even though they are technologically capable of doing so. Betts put forward an entire typology of nuclear-aspiring states, detailing the motivational logic of each type. With regard to the pariah state he argued, *inter alia*:

> "Finally, there are the pariah states, the thorniest problem of all. They combine the disadvantages of pygmies and paranoids along with more visceral and unremitting opposition by their regional enemies and growing isolation from most of the rest of the world. Their capability for producing at least a modest number of crude nuclear weapons also exists already. Israel is universally assumed to have at least ten untested bombs in stock. South Africa has its own facilities for uranium enrichment."[66]

In other words, the pariah state epitomizes Betts' argument, as it is said to combine the motivational logics of the pygmy state with that of the paranoid state only to add to it the unique characteristics of the pariah state. According to Betts, just as nuclear proliferation is a symptom of the inter-bloc conflict, so is the nuclear proliferation of those states' pariahtude – a symptom, not yet another evil-doing, that both proves the fundamental criminality of those states as well as justifies the need to ostracize them. Betts warned that further pressuring those states would only accelerate their proliferation, precisely because the reason they wish to attain the bomb is their extremely hazardous international status. Instead, he suggested dissuading those states from developing nuclear capabilities by means of answering at least some of their security concerns, thereby supplying them with suitable incentives to give up their nuclear program.

This is exactly where one finds the true meaning of the concept of the pariah state. Rather than an actual kind of international state-actor, it was an ideological construct meant to re-justify support of some of the US's client-states. After Vietnam and the US's rapprochement with China in the early 1970s, anti-communist rhetoric became growingly ineffective. Unfortunately, its great successor – universal human

64 Betts.
65 See for example, Harkavy, "Pariah states and nuclear proliferation", p. 135, fn. 1.
66 Betts, pp. 166-167.

rights discourse, which US President Carter effectively personified – was hardly compatible with some of the US's client-states.[67] In his article, Betts utilized Carter's anti-proliferation discourse as a means for neutralizing some of the adverse effects of the new human rights discourse. Bluntly put, if one did not want to have a nuclear South Africa and an Israel that publicly flexes its nuclear muscles, one had to tolerate the less-than-humanitarian nature of the South African apartheid regime,and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (or, for that matter, the oppressive regimes of Chile, Taiwan and South Korea).

The concept of the pariah state enabled the US to join the international community in the de-legitimisation of some of its own client states, while not abandoning those states altogether. Seemingly, the concept was not normative in the sense that it did not criticize the ostracising of those states, but rather accepted it as a given, while only attempting to analyze the consequences entailed by it. What the concept of the pariah state actually did was to suggest that pariahtude was not a stable and enduring situation – that is to say, that the sanctions of the international community will not achieve their goal – not in the short run in any case. Redirecting support for those embarrassing regimes via other pariahs, i.e. an alliance of pariah states, was but another feature of this new mode of international cliental that the US tried to stabilize.

In other words, according to this explanation, Israel's ties with South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s were simply part of the way the US tried to maintain its vested interests in existing stable client regimes, as the anti-communist crusade gradually gave way to the new and enthusiastic crusaders of universal human rights. Neither a shared ideology nor an identical international status, but a niche within the international equilibrium or global balance of power, in which two of the US client states could make ends meet.

7. CONCLUSION

Israel's ties with South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s are both more trivial and more illustrative than has been assumed so far. As this study argued, the current tendency to suggest that there was an Israeli-South African alliance that was underwritten by ideological affinities is essentially garbled. It may, however, be explained (and to some extent justified) by the political situation in contemporary Israel-Palestine. On the other hand, the currently somewhat untrendy industrial-military complex explanation indeed points out the sectors within those states who had an interest in that relationship, and who were involved in its manifestations on

67 For a critical history of the emergence of the human rights discourse, see Samuel Moyn , *The last utopia – human rights in history* (Cambridge, 2010); and also Mark Mazower, "The strange triumph of human rights", *The Historical Journal* 47(2), 2004.

the ground. However, this explanation also argues that these complexes were over-powerful and hence able to force the relationship on their states, promoting their own sectorial and private interests at the expense of national ones. As this study showed, it is hardly possible to determine this was indeed the case.

The pariah states alliance explanation suggests that the relationship between the two states was not underwritten by ideological affinities but by their similar international status. Yet, as shown, it is simply untrue that Israel was of the same international status as South Africa. Moreover, the concept of the pariah state should be understood as an ideological construct aimed at re-legitimizing support of certain client states whose regimes were incompatible with the emergence of the universal human rights discourse in the mid-1970s. In this regard, Israel's ties with South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s were the way by which those states, who were dependent on US patronage (i.e. imperative for the latter's interests) could keep going. Their policies were incompatible with the discourse of universal human rights that replaced the by-then exhausted anti-communist rhetoric. Both states were effectively forced into this damning relationship, so that other, more powerful, states could maintain a better wholesome façade. In this sense, both states were dirty scapegoats.