



Academic Paper

# The Security Penetration of Israel into Sub-Saharan Africa



**Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay**

**August 2022**



**Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations**

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## The Security Penetration of Israel into Sub-Saharan Africa

Prof. Dr. Walid Abd al-Hay<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

An Israeli academic study on the national security doctrine for Israel suggests that “Israel should train African immigrants (Jewish Ethiopian and illegal immigrants) and send them back as spies to form a native grid of espionage.”<sup>2</sup> In 2020, a report revealed that seven African countries use Israeli cyberespionage tools to snoop on calls, texts, and the location of phones of influential figures in various sectors.<sup>3</sup>



Also, Israeli newspapers have revealed that a document in the Israel State Archives indicated that in 1962, some Africans underwent military training by Mossad operatives in Ethiopia, where Nelson Mandela was among them. These operatives were unaware of Mandela’s true identity until his arrest later.<sup>4</sup>

David Barnea, who became Mossad chief in 2021, gives particular importance to the African continent, and is working on expanding Mossad’s activities in various African countries. Since he was previously responsible for locating, recruiting and handling agents, it is expected that the recruitment of agents in the African continent will increase significantly in the near future.<sup>5</sup>

The grandson of former President Nelson Mandela, Zwelivelile Mandela, has revealed the penetration of Israel into Africa through the supply of military and surveillance technology to several governments and by supplying opposition forces with weapons under the cover of agricultural projects, thus fueling civil wars with the aim of penetrating African societies. Mandela gives example the events of Rwanda, South Sudan, Cameroon, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and Togo.<sup>6</sup> It is known that Israel is the eighth in the list of the world’s ten largest weapons exporters, with a share of 3.1% of all security exports worldwide.<sup>7</sup>



Zwelivelile Mandela



These reports were supported by what was revealed about South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was targeted by Israeli-manufactured Pegasus spyware, developed by the Israeli-based private company the NSO Group, which enables the hacker to read messages, listen in and even record calls, as well as snap pictures at a distance. Such information were confirmed by Amnesty International reports.<sup>8</sup>

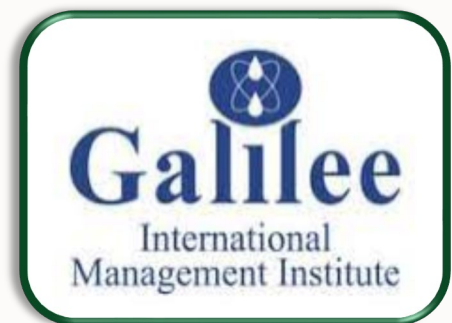


African news reports have confirmed the Mossad's use of Pegasus programs to influence the African elections, as demonstrated in Botswana in 2014, Ghana in 2016 and 2020, and Malawi in 2020, in addition to other countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Senegal, Angola and Niger. Israel uses its aid, especially in agricultural technology, to influence African decisions. This was clear, in 2016, for when Senegal submitted a draft resolution to the United Nations (UN) condemning settlements in the West Bank, Israel canceled its aid to Senegal.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Role of Institutes and Universities in Building Israeli Espionage Networks in Africa**

In addition to the alignment of Israeli academia with Israel's policies and their cooperation with the security services, as Israeli professor Ilan Pappé has reported,<sup>10</sup> some institutes specialize in preparing leaders, especially African students.

In this context, the Galilee International Management Institute (GIMI) is mentioned, which draws its students from senior officials and experts in foreign countries, mostly African, who usually exceeded one thousand, and in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry. In 2016, when Netanyahu made his African visit, two GIMI graduates were serving in the cabinet of the new Ugandan government. Another became Ghana's minister of education. A fourth, a rear admiral, worked as policy director at naval headquarters in Nigeria. GIMI head Joseph Shevel, who served as a captain in the Israel Defense Forces, said most African countries had at least one institute graduate serving in a cabinet post. He added that enrollees in general "learn Israeli management techniques," and in defense and security, for example, this is "not how to shoot and bomb," but rather how to "establish national and regional defense networks."



This is most evident in East Africa. GIMI periodically sends Israeli specialists to check that local instruction by its graduates stays on track.<sup>11</sup>

## Israeli Objectives

The Israeli objectives of spying on African countries vary, and Israel tends to prioritize the security dimension in its relations with African countries, over traditional ones. It is even ranked the fourth globally in terms of the dominance of the security establishment in Israel's considerations and decision-making processes in the field of foreign relations, where security ties include arms deals, knowledge and intelligence sharing, help in the fight of pro-Israel regimes against armed opposition, and training of security forces. The motives driving closer relations between Israel and African countries are as follows:<sup>12</sup>

► 1. Reducing African Solidarity with Palestine: Israel's relations with African countries deteriorated the most between 1967 and 1977. However, there was some improvement following the peace agreement with Egypt, the Oslo Accords and Wadi Araba Treaty. In 2021, Israel had diplomatic relations with 41 African countries, and with 11 of them it had an embassy.

► 2. Gaining Support at the United Nations: This motive was cleared in Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks at a meeting with Israeli representatives in Africa in 2017, "If I look at our foreign policy interests as a pyramid, Africa is very high...The first interest is to dramatically change the way Africa votes at the UN and in international bodies, from opposition to support." This is also the belief of Knesset Member Avraham Neguise, who said, "We need Africa to vote for us in UN institutions. For example, today Ethiopia is a member of the Security Council...We want Ethiopia to be with us, and the same goes for other countries in various UN organizations, such as UNESCO."<sup>13</sup>



Avraham Neguise

► 3. Helping African rulers close to Israel stay in power: Western and Israeli reports indicate the strong Israeli support of the current military leadership in Sudan, they also mentioned that the Mossad chief, David Barnea, personally visited Chad in 2021 and discussed the possibility of Israel maintaining a forward base there, from which to fly its surveillance drones. They could be helpful in monitoring the security situation in Libya and Algeria, thus helping Morocco that has become one of four Arab states to normalize relations. Moreover, Israel wants to keep close tabs on the Polisario Front's representatives who have found refuge in Algeria. Barnea also sought to thank the Chadians for supporting Israel's bid to become an observer at the African Union.<sup>14</sup> However, this accreditation was



opposed by Algeria,<sup>15</sup> and no less than 21 of 55 member states expressed their discontent with the decision to admit Israel as an observer.<sup>16</sup>

The Israeli security roles are evident in the pursuit of some opposition organizations, especially those described as Islamic, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria; in the cooperation with the Cameroonian army, which depends to a large extent on armaments from Israel; in the security cooperation with Eritrea to monitor Islamic movements in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia, on the one hand, and to be in the proximity of the Red Sea coast and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait so as to monitor what Israel considers “Iranian” activities, on the other hand; and in the unlimited support of South Sudan until its secession, which became one of Israel’s most consistent supporters in international forums, including the UN.



Reliable news sources reported that the Israeli intelligence services have been pushing to strengthen Israeli-Arab relations, and that meetings were held with Sudanese and Libyan military leaders to push for the normalization of ties.<sup>17</sup> Israeli studies consider that there is a link between the Israeli desire to limit military aid to the Palestinian resistance in Gaza through Sudan, and the military coup in Sudan and the rush of the putschists to normalize relations with Israel in exchange for Israeli support.<sup>18</sup>

Israel focuses sometimes on the security units of the African presidents. For example, in 1994 the president of Congo-Brazzaville Pascal Lissouba hired a private military provider from Israel to provide security and train his personnel, while he was busy dismantling those units loyal to the former president.<sup>19</sup> Studies on the private security companies (PSCs) in Angola, indicate that most PSCs there are Israeli ones, which secure the diamond trade, provide security for the Angolan president, and help arrange arms procurement from a third party, in addition to securing specific needs for the armed forces.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes the security relationship between Israel and some African leaders becomes ambiguous, as happened in 1971 with Uganda’s former President Idi Amin, whom Israel helped to overthrow the regime. However, afterwards there was a dispute between him and Israel concerning arms for his army, and their relations were disturbed.<sup>21</sup>



Idi Amin



► 4. Economic gains, by selling Israeli cyberespionage tools until 2022 to eight African countries, however the Pegasus scandal greatly affected this endeavor. The total exports from Israel to sub-Saharan Africa (non-Arab African countries) accounts for a mere 1% of Israel's global exports, which means that the \$850 million worth of total trade with sub-Saharan Africa is not of strategic importance, especially since it has also tended to fluctuate over the past few years, and since 2011 it has been declining. 73% of this trade is with four countries, where in 2019, it reached \$270 million with South Africa; \$173 million with Nigeria; \$121 million with Ethiopia; and \$57 million with Kenya. And 27% of this trade is with the rest of the sub-Saharan African countries (37 countries).<sup>22</sup>



This means that the security aspect of sub-Saharan Africa is more important to Israel than the economic aspect.

This is evident in the Israeli arms sales to Africa, as they provide the chance to penetrate into African military institutions; hence, paving the way to influence decision-makers there. Arms sales include heavy and light weapons, maintenance, and brokering weapons not originating from Israel, similar to what happened with Serbia in 2008. Israeli arms sales to African countries are growing steadily, with defense exports increasing 70% between 2015 and 2016. Less than 1% of deliveries of major weapons to sub-Saharan Africa came from Israel, particularly to Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, the Seychelles, South Africa and Uganda.<sup>23</sup> It is known that Israel has not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, and as the Database of Israeli Military and Security Exports (DIMSE) indicates, Israel uses this situation to ensure that some African dictatorships that support Israel remain in power. DIMSE gives as an example the dictatorships in Angola, Cameroon and Uganda which have relied on Israeli military support for decades. In other cases, Israel would support some parties during the struggle for power, as happened in Congo, when it provided financial support for the ouster of Mobutu Sese Seko and the takeover of the state by Laurant Kabila and it supported its stay in power afterwards. In 2017, the Mossad is alleged to have organized



the coup d'état against Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. International reports also reveal the role of the Israeli security services in the diamond trade and related conflicts in the African continent.<sup>24</sup>

According to the DIMSE database concerning the importers of Israeli military and security products between 2000–2019, they are ranked as follows:<sup>25</sup>

Country	Morocco	Angola	Uganda	South Africa	Cameroon	Côte d'Ivoire
Rank	33	36	40	47	53	75

In 2009–2019, Israeli security exports to Africa reached \$2.259 billion, i.e., \$225.9 million annually. Although the total Israeli security exports are declining, its security exports to Africa are generally increasing, where 50% of those go to Nigeria.<sup>26</sup>

**Security exports to Africa**

Year	Security exports to Africa (\$million)
2009	71
2010	77
2011	127
2012	107
2013	223
2014	318
2015	163
2016	275
2017	460
2018	150
2019	288





► 5. Contacting the Jewish community of some African countries, particularly in South Africa and Ethiopia. Organizations are established that would have connections with the Mossad, such as the Community Security Organisation (CSO). They battle the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement that support the Palestinian rights, or the activities of Al Aqsa Foundation, Hizbullah or Iran in South Africa.<sup>27</sup> Due to the limited number of Jews remaining in Africa, where most of them are concentrated in South Africa,<sup>28</sup> the role of the security services in securing Jewish immigration from Africa to Israel has declined.



► 6. Gathering information on African military industrial plans, as happened in 2010 with the South African anti-tank missile plans.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to technology, espionage operations may be executed through arranging medical care, finding housing, arranging logistics and financing operations to some sectors, individuals and groups. Technical data and all kinds of overt intelligence would be collected, whether a rumor or an article in a newspaper. Furthermore, airlines are also used in intelligence operations, where we find El Al playing a role as a major Israeli intelligence asset. In 2007, a major scandal erupted, causing a rift between the Mossad and South African Intelligence when it was revealed that El Al was essentially a front for Israeli intelligence.<sup>30</sup>



## Conclusion

- 1. If the historical relationship between the two apartheid regimes in South Africa and Israel is one of the most important reasons for the African position against Israel, then the normalization of the relations with the Arab African countries, Egypt, Sudan and Morocco, has greatly undermined the position of the African movement opposing Israel.
- 2. In the Israeli strategic calculations, the Israeli-African security relationship is superior to the economic and political ones. Espionage and collecting data about prominent figures and African institutions are the most prominent operations of Israeli security activity in Africa.



- ▶ 3. The Israeli companies operating in aviation, agriculture, mining, water, etc., are closely linked to the Israeli security services, which makes them a cover for espionage activity.

## Recommendations

- ▶ 1. The diplomatic activities of Palestinian resistance should pay more attention to the African liberation forces, for there is an African community that is prepared to cooperate with official and popular Palestinian diplomacy.
- ▶ 2. The Israeli security penetration into Africa must be given more importance in the Palestinian political and media literature.
- ▶ 3. The resistance forces have important activities in Africa, hence coordination is needed to confront the Israeli activity, especially since there are many popular Arab channels that support these forces.
- ▶ 4. The diplomatic activities of Palestinian resistance should always be conducted in consultation with the Algerian diplomatic corps, for it has extensive and deep experience in African affairs. This was evident when granting Israel an observer status in the African Union was suspended. This resistance must as well cooperate with study centers and Arab intellectual elites concerned with African studies.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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