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Israeli Interference in Sudan

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Introduction

The vast majority of documents relating to Israel's relations with Sudan remain cloaked in the secrecy of Israel's closed archives, due to their importance, their sensitivity, and the fact that the interval required before such documents are made available to the public has yet to pass. Some of the documents relating to this relationship, those dealing with the 1950s, have come to light. These documents, now available to researchers at the Israeli state archives, in addition to a number of historical works and memoirs, serve as the basis for this research.

When Israel was established, the man who formulated its national security policies – David Ben-Gurion – was deeply concerned about the possible emergence of an “Arab Ataturk” who could unite the Arabs to face off with Israel. Following the Egyptian Revolution July 23, 1952, the demand for Arab unity transformed from an elitist concept into a comprehensive political project enjoying the overwhelming support of the Arab peoples. It seemed to Ben-Gurion that what he had feared had become a reality; he thus focused his efforts on thwarting this project and ensuring its failure. He believed that the threat to Israel lay in the heart of the Arab world, i.e. those countries surrounding Israel, particularly Egypt. In order to strike a fatal blow to the Arab unity project, Ben-Gurion would have to strike at the project's cradle, Egypt, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the project's leader and main symbol. To do so, he sought to find “cracks” in the Arab body in the narrow and short-term interests of sectors within the Arab elite, and to find “common interests” with sectarian and ethnic minorities in the Arab world. Ben-Gurion also sought to establish alliances with the countries of the Arab world's “periphery”, which he could then pit against the Arab heartland around Palestine. In the 1950s and 1960s, this outer belt included Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, as well as Sudan and Yemen.

The Beginnings of the Umma Party's Communication with Israel

In June 1954, Sudan's Umma Party sent a delegation to London in hopes of securing British support for Sudanese independence. The delegation included Siddiq al-Mahdi, eldest son of the party's founder¹, and Mohammed Ahmed Omar, deputy secretary general of the Umma Party in London. In London, British intelligence (MI6) advised the delegation to seek Israeli assistance.² On June 17, 1954, the delegation met with officials from the Israeli Embassy in the British capital. The parties agreed to continue to meet, on the grounds of their common hostility to Egypt, and also agreed that Mohammed Ahmed Omar would act as permanent liaison between them.³ In his diary entry for September 27, 1955, Prime Minister Moshe Sharett recorded what can be viewed as instance on the continuation of these meetings between the Umma Party and Israel, at a high level. He wrote the following: “I sat down with Josh Pelmon, who had returned from Istanbul, to hear his report on the continuing negotiations between the leader of the Sudanese Umma party and [Bank of Israel Governor] David Horovitz, now in that same city for the

¹ Abdel-Rahman Al-Mahdi who is the son of Muhammad Ahmad Ibn Assayed Abdallah, known as “the Mahdi”, the Sudanese sufi sheikh of the Samaniyya order and self-proclaimed Mahdi who led the Mahdist War to liberate Sudan from its British occupiers

² Avner Yaniv, *Politika va-Istrategia Be-Israil*, (Hebrew) (Politics and Strategy in Israel), Tel Aviv: Safaryat Poalim, 1994, p. 99.

³ Report of S. Ya'ari, August 15, 1956, Folder HETS 8624/1, Israeli State Archives. (The report summarizes Israeli-Umma party communications and relations since their start in 1954 and until August 1956).

World Bank conference. New potential for the development of business relations between us and them were clarified; their aim is to separate Sudan from any economic dependence on Egypt...”⁴

During his many meetings with Israeli officials, Mohammed Ahmed Omar explained Sudan’s growing concern about “Egypt’s attempts to increase its influence in Sudan, despite Egypt’s recognition of the country’s independence to the outside world.” He stressed that “the interests of the Sudanese, who cling to their country’s independence, are in harmony with Israeli interests” against the common danger of Egypt.⁵

Financial Negotiations between the Umma Party and Israel

Throughout the years 1954 - 1958, various contacts and meetings between the Umma Party and Israel took place, including complex negotiations on two key issues aimed at addressing what they saw as their common enemy: Egypt. The first issue was related to Israel’s provision of financial aid to the Umma Party in the form of loans that would enable it to confront Egyptian influence in Sudan, and to challenge Sudanese parties that were calling for political unity along the Nile Valley and advanced relations between Sudan and Egypt. The second issue revolved around Israeli financial investment in economic projects in Sudan, especially in the lands of the Mahdi as well as in projects that would generate financial profits for the Umma Party.⁶

The Umma Party was in dire need of money to finance its political activities in the intense competition with other Sudanese parties on the fate of Sudan and its future relations with Egypt. This was especially the case during periods of parliamentary elections. In this context, and in order to secure Israeli funding for the next electoral contest, Mohamed Ahmed Omar proposed to the Israeli officials that Israel buy cotton from the Mahdi, who owned massive plantations in Sudan. Omar’s proposal was that Israel would pay for three years’ worth of the Mahdi’s cotton crop in advance. The annual value of the Mahdi’s cotton plantation yield was estimated – according to what Omar told the Israelis – at 1.5 million pounds sterling. This was too high a price-tag for the Israelis to pay all at once, and so in the early months of 1956 they called on a British Zionist businessman, the chief executive of the firm Lewis and Peat, to study the possibility of purchasing the Mahdi’s cotton by paying in advance.

In February 1956, Lewis and Peat sent one of its senior staff members, by the name of “Warden”, to Sudan to carry out the study and to conduct negotiations with the Mahdi for the purchase of the following three years’ worth of his plantations’ cotton to be paid for in advance. “Warden” spent ten days in Sudan, during which he was accompanied by Mohammed Ahmed Omar, who arranged for him to meet with the Mahdi, other leaders of the Umma Party, and ministers in the Sudanese government. Among these was Defense Minister Abdallah Khalil, who was destined to become prime minister in July 1956. In his meeting with “Warden,” Abdallah Khalil expressed regret at the lack of communication channels between Sudan and Israel, and his desire to renew economic relations with Israel.⁷

⁴ Moshe Sharett, Yoman Ishi (Personal Memoire), Volume 4, Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1978, p. 1160.

⁵ Report of S. Ya’ar, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

After the completion of his visit to Sudan, “Warden” presented a comprehensive report on his activities in which he recommended a revolving credit loan to the Mahdi worth 1.5 million pounds sterling, in return for either a percentage of profits or a commission on the sale of the cotton. Moreover, “Warden” mentioned in his report that the Sudanese side had suggested the development of new lands for cotton cultivation in their country; these lands were to be appended to the Mahdi’s estate in the future. Because these sums were beyond the Israeli treasury’s capacity at the time, the governor of the Bank of Israel contacted several Swiss banks to see if they would provide the loans to finance these projects. From these contacts the Israelis discovered that their main problem would not be in obtaining the needed loans, but in the exorbitant rates that the Swiss banks would require as a warranty for the risks associated with investing such large sums in Sudan, particularly given the projects’ relationship with Israel. To overcome these obstacles, the Israelis and the Umma Party discussed the possibility of establishing an agricultural bank through which to finance the Israeli projects. As this would require a lengthy period of time, and in light of the impending Sudanese parliamentary elections and the Umma Party’s pressing need for money to contest them, Muhammad Ahmed Omar requested that the Israelis provide an immediate loan of 150,000 pounds sterling for use in the election campaign.⁸

A Senior Sudanese Official in Israel

The Mahdi’s dire need for the loan, in addition to the Umma Party’s pursuit of advanced relations with Israel against Egypt, necessitated a secret visit to Israel by a high-level Sudanese official. In preparation for this visit, and in order to decide on the loan request and the proposed Israeli projects in Sudan, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir brought together her country’s commerce and finance ministers, the head of the central bank, and the director general of the Prime Minister’s Office. Also taking part were the director general of the Foreign Ministry and several other Israeli officials and experts, and an extended meeting was convened on August 20, 1956.⁹

The archival documents dealing with the senior Sudanese official’s visit to Israel and the talks he held with Israeli officials near the end of August 1956 remain classified. There are, however, numerous reports that deal indirectly with these events, addressing such things as Israel’s ability to provide financial support for the Umma Party and the question of involving the great powers in supporting the Umma Party against Abdel Nasser’s Egypt, seeing as how this was beyond Israel’s own financial capacity. One document, issued by the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Jerusalem office and addressed to the Israeli ambassador in Paris, was dated August 28, 1956 – just a few days after the Sudanese official’s visit to Israel. It indicates that the development of Israel’s relations “with the Sudanese Umma party presents encouraging prospects. The ability of this party, both within Sudan and on its behalf, to curb the growing strength of the Egyptians and their partners, depends on the size of the political and economic support that are placed at their disposal. For this matter, we need partners. For our part, we believe that the French are appropriate, especially as the Sudanese man with whom we are in contact is not apprehensive of this partnership.”¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Top Secret letter from the Israeli Foreign Ministry, August 16, 1956, Folder H 8624/1, Israeli State Archives.

¹⁰ Letter from Eitan of the Jerusalem Office to the prime minister, September 2, 1956, Folder H 2454/14, Israeli State Archives.

Further illuminating this picture is a very important report drafted by the director general of the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, Teddy Kollek, and submitted to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on September 2, 1956.¹¹ This report addressed a number of issues, most notable that of raising enough money to support the Umma Party and identifying the appropriate partners to realize Israeli objectives in Sudan. It is clear from this report that Israeli interference in Sudan during this period, as well as Israeli provision of support to the Umma Party, was part of a comprehensive Israeli strategy under the leadership of Ben-Gurion against Abdel Nasser's Egypt.

It is also clear from this report that, in the context of formulating this strategy, Ben-Gurion held lengthy meetings with a select elite of Israeli "Arab affairs experts" in August 1956. This was followed by two meetings of Arab affairs experts for the purpose of evaluating the situation in the Arab world, the potential for infiltrating Arab political forces, and how best to accomplish this objective. "The participants in these meetings concluded that the Arab world should be penetrated through the cracks already existing within it" and they "believe that we could establish relations with large groups in the Arab world that fear the rise of Abdel Nasser."¹² In his report, Kollek also said that a number of these "experts in Arab affairs" had traveled to Europe, that they had begun to contact groups from Arab countries, and that "some of these contacts bode well." Kollek then referred to the senior Sudanese official who visited Israel, stating that the official "was convinced that we have more capacity than he assumed before his visit to Israel. In spite of this, I am afraid that if we do not offer much, the disappointment that would result would be worse than had we not invited him all, because he will think that our lack of action stems for our lack of desire to support rather than our lack of [financial] ability."¹³

In his report to Ben-Gurion, Kollek mentions something related to important aspect of Israeli intelligence activity in Egypt. He notes that the Israeli "Arab Affairs experts contacted two serious and important men in Egypt, and spoke to one of them about a multifaceted propaganda plan. The implementation of this plan requires a great deal of money." Kollek then moves to another subject, to the need to involve France and the United States in the Israeli activities in Sudan and other Arab countries, because "it is clear that the necessary capacity for the proper implementation of these activities is not available to us. On the other hand, there is a fear that if we involved foreign powers in this issue, the relations we have established will likely be passed on from our hands to those of others. In my opinion, even if such a risk exists (and I believe that it is possible to prevent this from happening), it would be better to have others carry out activities against Abdel Nasser rather than not have operations carried out against him at all for a lack of capability. I believe we should not behave like a dog that has no teeth who sits next to an excellent bone that was thrown to him and that he is not able to enjoy eating, but constantly barks and does not allow his colleagues to reach the bone."

At the conclusion of his report, Kollek recommends the allocation of an amount of money that would be provided in advance and placed at the disposal of Israeli officials in charge of this activity, and the involvement of French and American intelligence agencies in the project.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Intensification of Umma Party Communication with Israel on the Eve of the Tripartite Aggression

Contacts between Israel and the Umma Party intensified on the eve of the tripartite (Israeli, French and British) invasion of Egypt. France and Britain joined Israel in supporting and developing relations with the Umma Party against Egypt and against the Sudanese parties that were calling for an alliance with Egypt. According to a report sent by Y. Palmon to Foreign Minister Golda Meir, Muhammad Ahmed Omar told the Israelis that the Mahdi and the Umma Party, as well as supporters of the Ansar sect, considered the Egyptians to be enemies, and that they would be happy to see a weakening of Egypt's power and a decline in its influence.¹⁵

In the report, Palmon adds that there are Sudanese forces competing with the Umma Party. Most important among these is the Khatmiyya sect and its political wing, the People's Party, which is very supportive of Egypt and Nasserism, as well as the Azhari group and the country's southerners. The report states that both the Azhari group and the southerners are opportunists, and may join the camp of Egypt supporters. It goes on to say that as the date for the Sudanese parliamentary elections nears, the Umma Party faces two options. One is that the party completely avoids taking a stand on all issues relating to Egypt in order to avoid provoking Cairo into taking an openly hostile attitude towards the party. Such a course of action could lead the Umma Party down a path in which it would receive modest financial aid from Egypt, thereby increasing Egyptian influence in Sudan. The second option is to take a clear position opposing Egypt and the Arab League. This would add to the pressures facing Egypt and its allies from the Arab states and the Soviet Union. The report indicates that Egypt offers generous financial support to the Sudanese parties opposed to the Umma Party. Palmon's recommendation to Meir was that Israel offer loans to the Umma Party worth USD 100,000 without requiring collateral, and a further loan of USD 300,000 directly to the Mahdi in return for guarantees in the form of bills (promissory notes). Palmon added that France also might provide financial backing for the Umma Party as a result of relations established between Mohammed Ahmed Omar and Paris as a result of Israel's initiative and support. At the conclusion of his report, Palmon requests Meir's response within a week so that he may deliver it to Mohammed Ahmed Omar.¹⁶

On September 17, 1956, Israeli diplomat Uri Lubrani sent a message from Jerusalem to Eliahu Sasson, at the time Israel's ambassador in Rome, informing him of the decisions taken by Israel regarding Sudan.¹⁷ These were:

1. It was decided to ask Avia and Konikov to look into the possibility in Geneva of establishing an agricultural bank in Sudan to be placed at the disposal of our projects there;
2. It was decided to search in Europe and the United States for ways to raise funds for use in economic projects in Sudan;
3. It was decided to contact the French to involve them in projects and activities in Sudan. Conversations have been carried out with Gilbert, who showed enthusiasm in the issue, and Ziamah Dibon will travel to Paris to arrange a meeting between Mohammed Ahmed Omar and Gilbert;

¹⁵ Letter from Y. Palmon to Foreign Minister, September 10, 1956, Folder H, 8624/1, Israeli State Archives.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Report of Uri Lubrani to Elyahu Sasson, September 17, 1956, Folder H, 8624/1, Israeli State Archives.

4. It has been agreed with Avia and Konikov to extend a loan to the Mahdi worth USD 300,000, in exchange for promissory notes signed by the Mahdi to ensure the amount's repayment. USD 50,000 of this amount are to be paid to the Mahdi immediately;
5. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion has suggested that the director general of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture, Haim Gevaty as well as the diplomat and member of the Knesset Ehud Avrieli travel to Sudan to be abreast of Israeli activities in Sudan. It is as yet not clear who will travel to Sudan. The Israeli objective is to send high-level envoys to Sudan to bestow the appropriate seriousness upon the cooperation between Israel and Sudan, and its development to a high level.

In his report, Lubrani added that the prime minister of France and his foreign minister had shown interest in the issue of Sudan, and had tasked senior officials in the French Foreign Ministry to submit concrete proposals to support the Sudanese Umma Party. On this basis, the French Foreign Ministry forwarded the following suggestions:

1. To provide a loan to Sudan worth 2 million pounds sterling;
2. To provide direct assistance to the Umma Party in the upcoming parliamentary elections by providing printing presses, and covering travel and other expenses;
3. To send a special French envoy to Khartoum whose task would be to purchase the Mahdi's cotton crop, paying for the cotton in advance;
4. The French agreement, in principle, to assist Sudan in establishing an air force on the condition that communication on this matter be carried out officially between the French and Sudanese governments.

Uri Lubrani added that Mohamed Ahmed Omar, after completing his mission in Paris, would travel to Geneva to complete, with Moshe Sasson, the agreement with Avia and Konikov.¹⁸

Spying on Abdel Nasser for Israel on the Eve of the Tripartite Aggression

The Mahdi visited Egypt in the middle of September 1956. He held a series of talks with the Egyptian leadership, and met with President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Mahdi was accompanied on this visit by the head of the Sudanese Parliament, Mohammed Saleh al-Shanqeeti, a personal friend of the Mahdi's and, according to Israeli documents, his close confidant. Shanqeeti joined the Mahdi in the first phase of talks with Abdel Nasser. Barely ten days had passed since the meeting he attended between the Umma party leader and Abdel Nasser when Shanqeeti submitted a detailed and comprehensive report on the Mahdi's meeting with the Egyptian president to an Israeli official in Geneva on September 27, 1956. In it, Shanqeeti informed the Israeli official of the following:¹⁹

1. Sudan considers Egypt's growing military strength as a direct threat to the independence of Sudan. Sudan fears that the next war waged by Egypt will be directed at Sudan and not against Israel;
2. Sudan has a national interest in weakening the Egyptian regime and promoting friendship with Abdel Nasser's opponents. The Umma party is, however, forced to appease Egypt in the near

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Letter from M. M. Yisrael from Geneva to the Foreign Minister and Palmon, September 28, 1956, Folder H, 2454/14, Israeli State Archives.

future because of Sudan's dependence on the Suez Canal, the need to resolve the water conflict with Egypt, Sudan's need to pay its external debts and the approach of Sudanese parliamentary elections;

3. Abdel Nasser wanted the Mahdi to visit Egypt to show the world that Sudan supports Egypt on the Suez issue. In spite of Abdel Nasser's allusions that he wanted the Mahdi to visit Egypt so the latter could mediate between Egypt and the United Kingdom, Abdel Nasser did not request any such mediation from the Mahdi at all;
4. The Mahdi's motives in visiting Egypt were to communicate his position on Suez to Abdel Nasser and to show the citizens of Sudan that he too has good relations with Abdel Nasser, which will be to the Mahdi's advantage in the upcoming Sudanese parliamentary elections;
5. The Mahdi told Abdel Nasser that Sudan recognizes Egyptian ownership of the Suez Canal, but stressed that the value of the Suez Canal stems from its use by the West. As such, it is necessary that international guarantees be offered to ensure freedom of navigation in its waters;
6. In his meeting with Abdel Nasser, the Mahdi described the catastrophe that would befall the Arabs if the Western powers decided to engage in a military intervention, and the crisis that Sudan would suffer if the West decided to boycott the Suez Canal;
7. Abdel Nasser's assessment was that the West will not resort to military force, and that the Western powers would be forced eventually into a compromise with Egypt that would ensure Egypt's national dignity;
8. The only subject on which the Mahdi and Abdel Nasser agreed was Egypt's commitment to pay 8 million pounds from the frozen Egyptian accounts in London, and the rest of the money owed to be repaid within five years;
9. Shanqeeti believed that the imposition of a 30-day economic blockade on Egypt would suffice to topple Abdel Nasser's regime.

The Israeli official sent a letter to Meir and Palmon informing them of the content of Shanqeeti's report. He concluded the letter by stating that he had recently learned that the British government had advised the Khartoum branch of Barclays Bank to pay 1 million pounds sterling as advance payment into the account for the Mahdi's cotton crop for the coming year.²⁰

The friendly relations of both the Umma Party and the Sudanese government with Israel continued beyond the 1956 Tripartite Aggression against Egypt. Relations with Israel included limited cooperation in certain military areas. The ties between the two sides reached one of their high points when Meir held a secret official meeting with Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Khalil at a hotel in Paris during the summer of 1957.²¹ A year after this meeting, a military coup overthrew Abdallah Khalil's government in Khartoum, bringing Ibrahim Abboud to power. Abboud changed Sudan's policy towards Egypt, bringing his country closer to its northern neighbor and its approaches to domestic, regional and international politics. This led naturally to the severing of Sudan's relations with Israel.

Israeli Interference in South Sudan

The contacts between Israel and the rebel movement in South Sudan began in 1963. From that year until 1972, numerous meetings were held between South Sudanese activists and leaders with Israeli officials in

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Avner Yaniv, *op.cit.* p.177.

Israeli embassies in Uganda, Ethiopia, Chad, Congo and Kenya.²² These contacts and relations were strengthened and deepened during the “War of Attrition” between Egypt and Israel.

The archival documents covering Israel’s interference in South Sudan during that period remain out of public reach, sealed as they are in the Israeli state archives. In an interview with Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, however, Joseph Lago – head of the Anya-Nya movement, which led the South Sudanese rebellion in that period – lifted the veil, describing the background, beginnings, and various dimensions of Israel’s interference in the South Sudan rebellion of this stage.²³

From this interview, we can ascertain that Lago met with Israel’s ambassador to Kampala in early 1969, handing him a letter to Israel’s prime minister at the time, Levi Eshkol. In his letter, Lago stressed the shared interests between Israel and the South Sudanese rebel movement, particularly the “war against the Arabs”. On the basis of these common interests, Lago asked for Israeli military support for his Anya-Nya movement. He indicated that if Israel provided Anya-Nya with weapons, it would use them to launch a war against the Sudanese Army, engaging and disturbing it to the point where Sudan would no longer be able to support Egypt and other Arab countries in their war against Israel. Eshkol died in February 1969, before receiving Lago’s letter, and was replaced by Golda Meir, who received the letter and invited its author to visit Israel. Lago accepted the invitation, and during his visit met with Meir at her office in Jerusalem, also meeting with other Israeli officials and visiting a number of military bases.

During his visit, Lago concluded an agreement with Israeli officials through which Israel committed to provide the Anya-Nya movement’s fighters with arms and training in Israel. Notable among those armed and trained by Israel was John Garang, who would later rise to become head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Sudan. Shortly after Lago’s visit, Israel began to provide Anya-Nya with various types of weapons, carried by Israeli transport planes that would deliver them to Juba in South Sudan via Uganda. These shipments included a multiplicity of weapons, among them artillery, anti-tank missiles, machine guns, light weapons and others that Israel had captured from the Arab armies in the 1967 war. In his *Haaretz* interview, Lago indicated that Israel did not provide Anya-Nya with weapons made in Israel or with modern Western weapons, so as that Israel’s support of the rebels would not be discovered. The arms shipments that began to arrive in south Sudan were supplemented by Israeli military advisers, who were embedded into the rebels’ military bases. According to Lago, Israel’s aid to Anya-Nya shifted the balance of power, strengthening the rebel movement’s position to the point where it became a force to be reckoned with in the conflict.

Israel continued to supply weapons to Anya-Nya via flights from Uganda to South Sudan until 1972. In that year, President Idi Amin of Uganda changed his policy of support for the Israelis, severing his country’s relations with Israel, closing its embassy in Kampala and expelling all Israelis from Uganda, including the many Israeli military advisers stationed there. This forced Israel to stop using Uganda as a throughway to south Sudan for arms destined for the south Sudan rebels. Israel’s other delivery option was the transfer of arms by airplanes passing through Ethiopian airspace to Kenya, and from there to south Sudan. This route, however, was both more expensive and more dangerous. In 1972, the Sudanese

²² Mohamed Omer Beshir, *The Southern Sudan: From Conflict to Peace*, (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1975), pp. 91 – 92. See also: Tim Niblock, *Class And Power In Sudan*, (NY: Albany, 1987), pp. 274 – 277.

²³ Dana Herman, “This is how a south Sudanese general convinced Israel to support the rebels,” *Haaretz*, January 30, 2011.

<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle>

government signed the Addis Ababa Agreement with the leaders of the South Sudanese insurgency, thereby putting an end to the rebellion. In the wake of this agreement, Lago rushed to the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, to explain the new situation to the Israelis, who were greatly disturbed by the peace agreement and the cessation of the rebellion.²⁴

Israel, Jaafar Numayri and Adnan Khashoggi

In his memoirs, Jacob Nimrodi, who served in senior positions within Israel's Mossad intelligence service, states that Saudi businessman Adnan Khashoggi was "the person to go to for every Israeli or Jew looking for ways into the Arab world."²⁵ It is clear from these memoirs that Khashoggi played a significant role in the establishment of relations between Israel and Sudanese President Jaafar Numayri. It is useful to shed light, albeit briefly, on the nature of Khashoggi's relations with Israel. Nimrodi's memoirs reveal that Khashoggi had established various complex relationships with many Israelis and American Jews. Among the Israelis who enjoyed strong relations with Khashoggi was David Kimche. In describing their relationship during the period that Kimche served as head of the Mossad in Paris, Nimrodi states that "relations have developed between [Kimche and Khashoggi] to the point that it is a true friendship."²⁶

In the mid-1970s, Nimrodi went to meet retired Israeli General Rehavam Zeevi, who had just completed his duties as an advisor on "terrorist" affairs to then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Nimrodi asked Zeevi to work with Khashoggi on certain security tasks. General Zeevi agreed to Nimrodi's request, and within a short period managed to earn the confidence of Khashoggi. Zeevi took on the task of managing Khashoggi's sprawling estate in Kenya, employing more than 40 Israelis in the operations of the estate and its security. Khashoggi also gave Zeevi the job of maintaining the security of his luxury yacht, tasking him with placing monitoring and surveillance equipment on the vessel so Khashoggi could keep an eye, quite literally, on his Arab and non-Arab VIP guests.²⁷ Of course Israeli intelligence could also share in knowledge of the contents of these surveillance tapes.

Khashoggi also established close ties with Numayri in the 1970s. In the latter part of that decade, Khashoggi informed Nimrodi – by then his friend and partner in various economic projects and business deals – that Numayri's situation within Sudan was serious and worrying. Khashoggi continued, "the Americans are not offering the desired assistance, while the Saudis were rejecting him [Numayri] completely. All the Americans were able to get from the Saudis was the purchase of some F-5 aircraft, and there were things Numayri needed far more. None of the Sudanese economic development plans were being implemented. More than this, it is imperative that Numayri gets an American security team to settle in Khartoum for his personal safety, like the forty two person team sent by the United States to Cairo to guard Anwar Sadat and his regime."²⁸

Nimrodi also states that in 1979, in order to help Numayri and Sudan, Adnan Khashoggi organized "a visit of his Israeli friends and partners to Khartoum." Khashoggi invited five veterans of the Israeli

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Yacov Nimrodi, *Masa' Hayati (My Life Journey)*, volume 2, Or Yehuda: Maariv, 2003, p.521.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.515.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

security services to Khartoum to meet with Numayri. They were: Nimrodi, Kimche, Al Schwimmer, Rahavia Vardi and Hank Greenspan. Upon their arrival in Khartoum from Nairobi, they met with Numayri. In his memoirs, Nimrodi indicates that the aim of this visit was to establish economic relations between Israel and Sudan. Nimrodi describes his and his colleagues' feelings upon meeting Numayri, saying: "It is as if we were in a dream. It was hard to believe that we were in Sudan, in the palace of one of the known Arab rulers who was greeting us and offering us food, speaking to us and encouraging us to engage in joint projects with him." Nimrodi added that Numayri tell his Israeli guests about his need for assistance in developing his country's economy, and that he had sought to establish economic relations with Israel on a permanent basis."²⁹

Numayri's meeting with Yigal Yadin

After Nimrodi and his accompanying delegation returned to Israel from their meeting with Numayri, Israel initiated a secret official meeting between the Sudanese leader and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Yadin. This meeting, held in New York, was quite amicable, and in this friendly atmosphere the two leaders laid the foundations for future cooperation between Israel and Sudan.³⁰

Numayri's meeting with Sharon

After his appointment to the position of Israeli defense minister in 1981, retired General Ariel Sharon sought to influence and bring about a qualitative shift in Israel's foreign and national security policies. Sharon believed that Israel's sphere of influence and the areas of its vital interests went well beyond the Arab front-line states, extending eastward to Pakistan and covering the entire northern and central parts of the African continent.³¹ In working towards his aims, Sharon visited Nairobi, from which he and his companions travelled in a private plane owned by Khashoggi to the latter's ranch near Kenya's southern border with Tanzania. Awaiting Sharon at the ranch were Numayri and Sudan's intelligence chief, Omar Mohammed Tayeb, as well as Khashoggi, Nimrodi and Schwimmer. In the meeting between Sharon and Numayri that ensued, the latter agreed to turn a blind eye on the emigration of Falasha Jews from Ethiopia to Israel through Sudan, in return for sums of money paid to him and Tayeb. Numayri also agreed to allow Israel to set up a weapons cache in Sudan for the benefit of an Iranian militant group which, with the help of Israel and Khashoggi, were planning to carry out military operations against Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's regime in Iran. Numayri also agreed to allow Israel to train these Iranian forces on Sudanese territory. Sharon and Khashoggi's plan regarding Iran, however, was not carried out due to internal Israeli differences between Sharon and his rivals in the Israeli government and security services.³²

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *Meragilim Lo Moshlamim: Siporo Shel Ha-Modi'in Ha-Yisraeli (Incomplete Spies: The Story of Israeli Intelligence)*, Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1990, p. 218.

³² *Ibid.* p.218.

Numayri and the migration of Falasha Jews to Israel

In the late 1970s, Israel sought to uproot the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. In order to achieve this, Israel started by initiating negotiations with the Ethiopian government, which it asked to send its own Falasha citizens to Israel. These negotiations, however, did not achieve the desired results for Israel. In 1979, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin asked Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to negotiate with Numayri in order to allow the migration of the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia to Israel through Sudan. Sadat agreed to this request and obtained Numayri's approval in principle, on the condition that the deal remained a complete secret.³³

At the beginning of 1980, a high-ranking Mossad officer arrived in Khartoum to meet with Tayeb and other Sudanese officials. The two sides agreed that Sudan would allow the passage of the Falashas through its territory to Kenya, from where they would travel on to Israel. The relocation of the Falashas via Sudan to Israel continued until it was reported by the international media, which led to the cessation of this migration.³⁴ In 1981, the Mossad, together with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, established a "tourism company" to use as cover to smuggle the Falasha Jews who had arrived in Sudan from Ethiopia. This company rented a plot of land located on Sudan's Red Sea coast, quickly transforming it into a base for Mossad units and Israeli naval commandos. Through this base, the Mossad smuggled 2,000 Falasha Jews to Israel across the Red Sea.³⁵

"Operation Moshe"

In light of the growing numbers of Falasha Jews coming to Sudan from Ethiopia, the Israeli government requested, both directly and through US intermediation, that Numayri authorize the transfer of Falashas by air from Khartoum to Israel. Numayri approved the Israeli request after the Mossad deposited USD 60 million in his personal account and those of some of his closest associates, including Tayeb. These accounts were in various European banks, particularly in Switzerland and London. Numayri's approval was also preceded by a US commitment to offer USD 200 million worth of aid to Sudan.³⁶

Based on this agreement, between November 21, 1984 and the first week of January 1985, 35 large aircraft loaded with Falasha Jews took off from Khartoum towards Brussels. The travelers would spend two hours in Brussels as their planes refueled before completing the journey to Israel. In the first week of January 1985, an interview with the head of the Jewish Agency's immigration and settlement division appeared in the Israeli settler movement magazine *Neqodah*, in which he offered some of the details about "Operation Moshe." This was the codename designating the Israeli operation of moving Falasha Jews from Sudan to Israeli through Brussels. As a result of the interview's publication, the story was reported by international news agencies, prompting Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to hold a press conference in which he officially acknowledged "Operation Moshe." On January 5, 1985, just two days after Peres's press conference, the Sudanese government informed the United States of its decision to halt the operation

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

as it had been exposed. By that time, approximately 1,000 Falasha Jews remained within Sudan's borders. In March 1985, following pressure by the US administration, Numayri agreed to the transfer of these remaining Falasha Jews to Israel aboard American aircraft.³⁷

Conclusion

The many "cracks" and divisions in Sudan, and the power struggles that have raged there, primarily in the north, have opened the door to Israeli interference in Sudan. At each stage of Israel's involvement in Sudan, Israel has used its interference to serve its strategic objectives in return for money or other bribes to the North Sudanese elites that have been prepared to do business with Israel. In the 1950s, Israel initiated its interference on the basis of opposition to Abdel Nasser's Egypt. In that period, the Sudanese Umma Party leaders went a long way in solidifying this alliance with Israel against Egypt before, during and after the Tripartite Aggression of 1956. In the late 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s, Israel built strong relations with Sudanese President Jaafar Numayri and his regime, to the extent that Numayri not only allowed Israel to relocate tens of thousands of Falasha Jews from Sudanese territory to Israel, but also allowed the establishment of a Mossad base in Khartoum as well.³⁸ As for Israel's support for the rebel movement in south Sudan, this was designed to further Israeli strategic interests. For when support for the rebellion served its interests, as it did in the late 1960s and early 1970s or later in the 1990s, Israel generously gave its support; but when the rebellion did not serve Israeli interests, during the period when its servant held the reins of power in Khartoum, as was the case in the late 1970s and until the mid-1980s, Israel refused to provide support for the rebellion in southern Sudan.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

³⁸ Yacov Nimrodi, *op. cit.*, p. 527.