



The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa

By Sasha Polakow-Suransky

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Prior to the Six-Day War, Israel was a darling of the international left, vocally opposed to apartheid and devoted to building alliances with black leaders in newly independent African nations. South Africa, for its part, was controlled by a regime of Afrikaner nationalists who had enthusiastically supported Hitler during World War II. But after Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967, the country found itself estranged from former allies and threatened anew by old enemies. As both states became international pariahs, a covert—and lucrative—military relationship blossomed between these seemingly unlikely allies.

Based on extensive archival research and exclusive interviews with former generals and high-level government officials in both countries, *The Unspoken Alliance* tells a troubling story of Cold War paranoia, moral compromises, and startling secrets.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

During the mid-1950s, the young state of Israel built diplomatic ties to postcolonial African nations on their common histories of oppression. But by 1987, Israel's alliances on the continent had completely changed—despite international sanctions, Israel maintained a close and covert relationship with South Africa; their military trade kept the Israeli economy vital and buttressed the faltering apartheid government. With recently declassified documents, Polakow-Suransky, an editor at *Foreign Affairs*, offers an important, provocative, and occasionally disturbing analysis of this clandestine alliance. He identifies two wars as decisive turning points in Israeli–South African relations. The 1967 Six-Day War and Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories alienated former friends and won it new enemies; and the 1973 Yom Kippur War left the economy in shambles, and created a powerful incentive for Israel to export arms to and cultivate its relations with the South African government. The author concludes his smart and readable study with a charged epilogue in which he writes that, as evinced by its policies towards Palestinians, Israel itself risks remaking itself in the image of the old apartheid state. (*June*)

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Review

“A hugely impressive book. . . . Groundbreaking.”

—*Newsweek*

“Important. . . . The best-documented, most thorough, and most credible account ever offered of the secret marriage between the apartheid state and Israel.”

—*Foreign Policy*

“Tantalizing. . . . Stands out because of the new material its author has dug up, which may be deemed to provide a measure of insight into ongoing and tricky proliferation issues.”

—*The New York Review of Books*

“Rich with intrigue and shocking details but written without a trace of stridency, [this] is the most authoritative account to date. . . . A meticulously researched book that reads like a spy thriller.”

—*The Nation*

“Fascinating. . . . Deft and fair. . . . A well-crafted work of history, not to be mistaken for another jeremiad. . . . A tale of clandestine missions, surreptitious shipments, and elaborate political theater between two states perched precariously on the margins of both their continents and the Cold War.”

—*The National Review*

“A harrowing account of a Mephistophelian bargain between two rogue states, told with indisputable fact—many of them new—and on-the-record interviews. No moralizing needed. Israel’s twenty-year collaboration with South Africa betrayed its founding principles and, more tragically, anticipated the cynicism with which it conducts its Palestinian policy today.”

—Seymour Hersh

“A compelling history. . . . All states engage in secret diplomacy, but Israel offers some of the most shocking

examples. . . . Although he deplores Israel's ties to the apartheid regime, Polakow-Suransky has treated the handful of officials in the two countries implementing that alliance fairly, even empathetically."

—*Foreign Affairs*

"A deft, pacy and revealing account. . . . Admirably dispassionate."

—*The Economist*

"The extent to which these two countries began to rely on each other economically and militarily in the mid-1970s through the late 1980s has never been so fully fleshed out. . . . There are some striking revelations."

—*Forward*

"A careful, painful, hugely important book."

—Peter Beinart, author of *The Icarus Syndrome*

"Provocative. . . . Richly detailed. . . . Especially relevant today, as nuclear rivalries escalate in the Middle East, because it explains—calmly, methodically, and with full documentation—how Israel and South Africa helped each other build atomic bombs in secret."

—Stephen Kinzer, *The Daily Beast*

"Path-breaking. . . . Remarkably revealing. . . . A wise, elegantly written, and strikingly fair-minded book which deserves the widest possible readership."

—Avi Shlaim, author of *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*

"Well-researched, readable and . . . balanced."

—*The London Review of Books*

"Comprehensive. . . . A very important contribution in the study of modern and contemporary history for its wealth of material and the objectivity of its author. It is highly recommended for both academics and the general reader."

—*The Middle East Journal*

"Fascinating. . . . A major, long overdue study of the rise and demise of one of the most intriguing alliances of our time. Polakow-Suransky has written a masterfully researched history that reads like a thriller unraveling the secrets of an alliance between two embattled societies under siege."

—Shlomo Ben-Ami, foreign minister of Israel, 2000-2001

About the Author

Sasha Polakow-Suransky is an editor at *The New York Times* op-ed page. He was a senior editor at *Foreign Affairs* from 2007 to 2011 and holds a doctorate in modern history from Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar from 2003 to 2006. His writing has appeared in *The American Prospect*, *The Boston Globe*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The New Republic*, and *Newsweek*. He lives in Brooklyn.

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