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Talking Points for the DDI

17 July 1986

Israel's Relationship with South Africa

Israel's National Unity Government has been publicly critical of South Africa's apartheid policy, but it is unlikely soon to reduce close, longstanding bilateral relations.

- Israel, in a largely symbolic move, closed its embassy in Pretoria for one day last month to protest the recently-imposed state-of-emergency.
- Prime Minister Peres, however, intends to follow closely the US lead in formulating Israel's stance toward Pretoria and thus is unlikely to take strong unilateral action.

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Deep-Rooted Economic Ties

South Africa is Israel's leading trade partner in Africa, with trade between the two amounting to about \$250 million annually, not including military equipment and diamonds.

- Israel imports almost 60% of its coal from South Africa.
- South Africa's large and affluent Jewish community-- numbering about 120,000--is the largest per-capita financial contributor to Israel.
- Tourism from South Africa is becoming increasingly important with declining visits from Europeans and Americans.

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Israel and South Africa also conduct extensive private contacts.

- Reciprocal visits by trade unions are frequent. A delegation from the Histadrut, Israel's powerful trade union organization, is now in South Africa organizing training for black workers.
- The two countries also cooperate in scientific and academic fields, including mathematics and advanced computer research.

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Military Relationship--Through the Backdoor

Tel Aviv conducts its military relationship with South Africa discreetly in hopes of minimizing damage to Israel's efforts to restore formal diplomatic ties with black African states. [redacted]

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Military cooperation began in 1964 with an agreement for licensed production of Israeli Uzi submachine guns in South Africa and has greatly expanded during the past decade. Israeli military assistance has included:

- Modernization of South Africa's Centurian tanks with 105mm guns now produced under license in South Africa;
- Three Reshef guided missile patrol boats and rights to produce the craft in South Africa. The deal also probably included transferring anti-ship missile technology which the South Africans now produce;
- Scout remotely-piloted reconnaissance drones;
- Galil assault rifles--a modified version of this rifle, designated the R-4, is now produced in South Africa;
- Technical assistance in South Africa's development of 155mm howitzers;
- Kits and technical assistance to modernize South Africa's Mirage 3 fighter aircraft;
- Sale of large quantities of small arms and ammunition;
- Riot control equipment--principally gas masks and tear gas--and extensive training programs. [redacted]

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South Africa recently unveiled its "new" fighter aircraft, designated the Cheetah.

- Last month the [redacted] that the new fighter would be an upgraded Mirage, similar to Israel's Kfir. He speculated that South Africa alone did not have the technical expertise required to develop an advanced combat aircraft, but with Israeli help could easily modernize its present fleet. [redacted]

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- Israel probably has provided an upgraded avionics and canard package similar to that in their Kfir, which would greatly improve the performance of the Cheetah.
- Israel probably provided the avionics and canard technology to improve the plane's mobility and all-weather capability.

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SUBJECT: Israel's Relationship with South Africa

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