Book Review
Africa and Israel: A Unique Case of Radical Changes in Israel’s Foreign Relations

Rabei Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Salam
Researcher at SIS

Mageness Press, affiliated to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem published a study entitled “Africa and Israel: A unique Case of Radical Changes in Israel’s Foreign Relations” by Arye Oded, a former ambassador who started his diplomatic life in Uganda, 1961. In the 1970s when relations were cut between Israel and Africa, he was in charge of the Israeli affairs in Kenya. In the 1990s, he worked as an ambassador to Germany and Kenya and as a non-resident ambassador to Kosovo, Zambia, Mauritius and Sichel Islands. He is one of the major lecturers in African studies at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Universities and wrote many books about the African relations.

In this book, Oded divided the Israeli African relations into three periods. Each period is discussed in a chapter; the honeymoon between both sides, the boycotting period, and the period of restoring the Israeli-African relations.

The First Chapter “Honeymoon” tackles the flourishing relations between Israel and the African non-Arab countries during the 1960s and early 1970s; including the Islamic countries south of the Great Desert. Such relations, especially the miscellaneous aids offered to various countries, gave the Israelis the feeling of pride and content. During these years, thousands of Israeli’s worked in Africa as chancellors, trainers and businessmen. As regards Africa, hundreds of Africans travelled to Israel to continue their studies in various civil and military fields. As for Israel, such achievements were exceptional due to the difficulties faced in other continents, especially Asia.

The writer mentioned the objectives that then motivated Israel to work with Africa as follows:

First: Political Objectives
1- Failing the Arab attempts of isolating Israel politically.
2- Breaking the political Arab siege through establishing relations with new countries in Africa.
3- Stripping the Arab Israeli conflict from the religious nature and considering it as a political one due to the fact that some African countries that
have relations with Israel include Muslim minorities.
4- Obtaining the support of independent Arab countries that represent one quarter of the UN member states in voting on resolutions concerning Israel.

Second: Economic Objectives
1- Africa is the main exporter to cocoa, coffee, woods, diamond and minerals to the world.
2- Purchasing raw materials from Africa allows Israel to market its products there.
3- Opening new vistas for the Israeli private sector in the fields of agriculture, communication, advanced technology, construction and paving roads, and for the military industrial companies.
4- Expanding the volume of trade with the East African countries should help in activating work in Elate Harbor and contribute to developing al-Naqab area.

Third: Strategic Objectives
1- The location of Ethiopia and Eritrea on the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandab Strait makes them geographically close to Israel, thus it is important to coordinate with such countries to secure the Israeli aviation and marine navigation to the Middle East and South Africa.
2- The Israeli presence in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya has a special security importance.

Fourth: Ideological and Humanitarian Objectives
1- The good intent which the Israelis showed towards Africa in the 1960s, where the feelings of sympathy and partnership prevailed with the Africans.
2- The suffering of the Jewish people from ethnicity, despise and humiliation got them closer to the Africans who also suffered from ethnicity and slavery.
3- Israel’s readiness to share its social and economic development experience with the African countries, despite its huge problems in security and in absorbing the huge emigration.

The Second Chapter “Severing Relations” reviews the change of situation to the worse starting from the 1967 War till 1973 War when the African states severed their relations with Israel. Furthermore, such states adopted a hostile policy against Israel in the UN and in other international councils, thus leading to a feeling of humiliation in the Israeli milieu. Despite the fact that the Africans said that the main reason behind severing relations is the Israeli occupation to the Arab lands, yet Israel knew that the real reason is the pressure of the Arab countries and the financial inducements they offered to the Africans, thus making it difficult on the Africans to take a different attitude.
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their relations with Israel in favor of this unity.

The Third and Last Chapter "Israel’s Return to Africa", the writer reviews the improvement in relations between Israel and most of the African countries that established diplomatic relations with Israel since 1982. Then, most Arab states alleged that they have done so upon the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and the ratification of the Peace Agreement with Egypt. Afterwards, Israel and Jordan signed Oslo Accord. In this respect, experts in Israeli foreign relations believe that the main reason behind restoring relations is the disappointment from the Arab aids to Africa, thus making the utmost benefit from the Israeli aids in various fields without losing the Arab ones.

Until writing these lines, relations between Israel and the black continent never returned the same as before. Most African countries still vote against Israel in the various international institutions. Despite its efforts, Israel never succeeded to change this situation. In this respect, in comparison to the 1960s, the Israeli-African relations currently witness a decline on the Israeli diplomatic activity list. It is, also, worthy to mention that Israel, currently, establishes diplomatic relations with 41 African countries; more than the
number of countries with diplomatic relations which it had during the 1960s.

Africa occupies a special position in the Israeli foreign relations; this idiosyncrasy can be revealed as follows:

a - Israel worked in Africa as a donor country. It was one of the first countries that offered assistance to the African countries upon their independence. However, such assistance was not in the form of financial aids, but was rather sending Israeli experts and qualifying the human cadres of such states in various agricultural, medicinal, educational, youth movement, social development, water resource development and desertification fields. Such aids were of special value on the long run.

b- The Israeli considerations as regards its activities in Africa were not only political, security and economic relations, but also humanitarian and ideological ones.

c- The Israeli relations with Africa were characterized by witnessing several changes varying from camaraderie to severing diplomatic relations. Such a phenomenon had never occurred between Israel and any other country worldwide.