

Israel, S. Africa pool their resources

Waiting to interview a brigadier at police headquarters in Capetown, South Africa, I idly sorted through a stack of publications in his office. One caught my eye: A glossy catalogue of Israeli police and riot-control gear. Another small but telling example of the highly developed, covert links between South Africa and Israel.

The close yet little-known co-operation in military and economic affairs between the two beleaguered nations has some of Israel's North American supporters increasingly worried. They fear, with reason, that the emotional tidal wave of anti-South African feeling in Canada and the U.S. may roll on to strike Israel.

Frequent media comparison of voiceless Palestinians under Israeli martial law with black South Africans or references to the Gaza Strip as "Israel's Soweto" have unsettled and angered Israel's partisans who still fume over the UN's equating of Zionism with apartheid.

Curious, then, why so many of Israel's liberal North American backers loudly clamor for sanctions against South Africa while turning a blind eye to Israel's ongoing military links with Pretoria — ones that violate the existing international arms boycott against South Africa.

A dramatic example of such links came earlier this month when South Africa proudly unveiled a new supersonic strike fighter called the Cheetah. The surprise appearance of this aircraft is significant.

Deprived by the international arms boycott of modern aircraft, South Africa has been increasingly threatened by the growing number of modern Soviet MiGs piloted by Cubans in Angola and Mozambique. Pretoria's ability to support Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas in southern

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Angola has been sharply curtailed by its fear of losing irreplaceable combat aircraft.

No longer. The Cheetah changes the balance of military power in southern Africa back to Pretoria's favor. How did South Africa manage to "build" a modern jet in the face of worldwide sanctions? A quick look at the Cheetah reveals that it is a slightly modified version of Israel's proven Kir fighter. While the airframe may have been built in South Africa it is likely that the plans, engines and avionics came from Israel.

An interesting genealogy, as well: Israeli agents stole plans for the French Mirage III from Switzerland where it was being assembled under licence. These plans were turned into the Kir and now into the Cheetah.

Military co-operation between Israel and South Africa extends far beyond aircraft. Israel supplies South Africa with arms technology, electronic systems, warships, missiles and helicopter subsystems, much of which is of American origin.

South Africa reciprocates by providing artillery technology (of Canadian origin), metals and — badly needed by Israel — empty areas for training and testing weapons.

Israeli military and security advisers are active in South Africa and, I learned, have even accompanied South African forces raiding into Angola.

More important, the two nations share a top-secret program of nuclear technology. South Africa supplies uranium and special metals; Israel, weapons technology and delivery systems. The Jericho medium-ranged, nuclear-armed missile, secretly built by France for Israel in the 1960s, has apparently been supplied by Israel to South Africa. Strong suspicions exist that the two countries secretly tested a nuclear weapon in the skies over the remote South Atlantic.

We should not be surprised that the two nations — and their other ally, Taiwan — work together. All have felt the sting of international arms boycotts. Amusingly, both Israel and South Africa secretly supply arms to some of the same black African nations that regularly denounce them and call for sanctions. In recent years, Israel and South Africa have both joined the ranks of the world's leading arms exporters.

Given these realities, those of Israel's supporters who call for the further punishment of South Africa by means of western sanctions should pause and reflect. South Africa is home to 100,000 Jews and is still an important, if inconvenient, ally of Israel. Helping deminish South Africa will not be good for Israel.

And who knows? The current anti-apartheid crusade might even go on, as crusading armies often do, and turn on Israel as its next target. If the world demands Pretoria negotiate with the ANC, could demands that Israel deal with the PLO be far behind?