

Liberal Internationalism, Offensive Realism and Intelligence Liaison: The Case of the Israeli and South African Intelligence Services²⁸⁴

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Abstract

For better or worse, the study of International Relations continues to be marked by a protracted battle between two competing theories: offensive realism and liberal internationalism. The study on which this article is based, sought to investigate which theory – offensive realism or liberal internationalism – offers the most compelling explanation for the alliance formation between the intelligence services of Israel and those of South Africa. In doing so, the study acknowledged the nuanced and multifaceted nature of intelligence liaison within the broader framework of statecraft and foreign policy. Although scholars have indeed examined the explanatory merit of offensive realism and liberal internationalism in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of (liberal) democratic and mixed (democratic and non-democratic) dyads, attempts at bringing the two theories to bear on the interactions of intelligence services have not been forthcoming, a shortcoming the current study attempted to address. This article therefore seeks to bridge this gap by presenting an evaluation of the relative explanatory worth of offensive realism and liberal internationalism in accounting for the alliance formation of the intelligence services of Israel and those of South Africa. The significance of the study lies in its examination of international politics and realist thought within the realm of intelligence services. Throughout the article, we use “intelligence services” and “intelligence” interchangeably. This approach helps bridge a gap in the existing literature by exploring the applicability of offensive realism and liberal internationalism in explaining alliances between Israel and South Africa's intelligence services.

Keywords: Offensive Realism, Liberal Internationalism, Alliance Formation, Intelligence Services, Foreign Policy

Introduction

Do states have no permanent friends in the international system, and should we “pay attention to what policymakers are saying or what they are doing”? The aim of the current study was to determine whether there is an interconnection between what states stand for

in their policy formulation on the one hand, and their actual actions in the international system on the other, and whether “friends” truly exist in the system. To achieve this, the study examined whether offensive realism, proposed by John Mearsheimer, or liberal internationalism offers the most compelling explanation for the formation of an alliance between the foreign intelligence services of Israel and those of South Africa.²⁸⁷ While scholars have indeed examined the explanatory merit of realism and liberal internationalism in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of (liberal) democratic and mixed (democratic and non-democratic) dyads, there is a lack of research on the interactions of foreign intelligence services. This article therefore seeks to address this gap by evaluating the relative explanatory value of offensive realism and liberal internationalism in accounting for the formation of an alliance between the intelligence services of Israel and those of South Africa.

It is, however, important to indicate that there were limitations to the study. Firstly, the availability of information on intelligence issues is notoriously problematic. Nevertheless, the current research was enforced by the rule “check and check again” (with this in mind, corroboration was important). Secondly, at times, intelligence services may pursue interests separate from, or even in direct opposition to, foreign affairs departments or the government of the day.²⁸⁸ Such cases are, however, rare. Consider, for instance, that in their review of United States (US) intelligence practices during the 1970s, the 1976 Report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence (better known as the Pike Committee Report) found that “[a]ll evidence in hand suggests that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], far from being out of control, had been utterly responsive to the instructions of the President and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs’.²⁸⁹ Moreover, in the majority of cases scrutinised in this study, the government of the day – whether that be in the case of Israel or (apartheid) South Africa – was acutely aware of the behaviour of their respective intelligence services. In cases where intelligence services pursue interests separate from the government of the day, the interests of the intelligence services are, moreover, likely to strengthen the case of offensive realism.

The article is structured as follows: in the first section, ‘Foreign Policy: Rhetoric of States’, the concept “foreign policy” is discussed, and theoretical insights from both liberal internationalism and offensive realism are provided. The second section, ‘Intelligence Services, Offensive Realism and Liberal Internationalism’ focusses on the important role intelligence services play. The third section, ‘Into the Future we go: Expectations of Liberal Internationalism, Offensive Realism and Intelligence Services’, reports on the potential outcomes of intelligence services adhering to either theory. The fourth section examines the Mossad alliance formation with the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) and the National Intelligence Service (NIS) during the apartheid era. This is followed by an analysis of the intelligence liaison between Mossad (i.e. the national intelligence agency of Israel) and the *State Security Agency* (SSA) in the post-apartheid era. Finally, the conclusion presents the findings of the study and an evaluation of whether the formation of an alliance between the Israeli and South African (SA) foreign intelligence services aligns with the theoretical arguments of liberal internationalism or offensive realism.

Foreign Policy: Rhetoric of States

Defining the concept “foreign policy” with absolute precision is challenging due to the diversity of interests, actors, decision-making processes, instruments and outcomes related to the concept. While no single overarching definition exists, this article provides two definitions to highlight certain common features. In addition, the article offers theoretical insights from both liberal internationalism and offensive realism to enhance our understanding of foreign policy.

Defining the term “foreign policy” is not easy, even though it is a common concept in contemporary International Relations (IR) discourse. Various theorists and theoretical perspectives offer different views and definitions of the term. Below are two examples:

Foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment.²⁹⁰

Foreign policy analysis focuses on the intentions, statements and actions of an actor – often, but not always, a state – directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements and actions.²⁹¹

Vale and Mphaisha propose that, in its most general form, foreign policy can be defined as ‘the sum total of all activities by which international actors [including intelligence services] act, react and interact with the environment beyond their national borders’.²⁹² On his part, Landsberg states that foreign policy is a branch or subset of policy, and defines policy as:

[A] purposive or goal-oriented course of action, pursued by decision-makers of a state, based on sets of social values, to solve problems on matters of public concern, on the basis of clear goals to be achieved.²⁹³

Foreign policy is therefore a planned course of action and strategies by the decision-makers of one state vis-à-vis those of another state in the external milieu.

From these two definitions, it can be deduced that there are four common features of foreign policy. Du Plessis proposes that, in the first instance, foreign policy is primarily viewed as an official governmental activity where the inter-state relations of one country vis-à-vis those of other states within the international system are manifested. This view is traditionally associated with state-centric realism where the dominant position of the sovereign state in an anarchic world system is emphasised. The second feature is that foreign policy is both an action (or initiative) and a reaction (or response) directed at the external milieu. The operational framework of foreign policy therefore transcends territorial sovereign borders. Thirdly, foreign policy involves a series of activities that result in decisions and actions pertaining to the pursuit of social values, interests and objectives. Lastly, the purpose of foreign policy is to create, control, adjust and alter external problems or issues, including those of the initiating actor or those of other actors involved.²⁹⁴

In the next section, the researchers endeavour to establish a distinction between the perspectives of liberal internationalism and offensive realism regarding the foreign policy of a state.

Liberal Internationalism

Jackson and Sørensen identify five values that underpin any (liberal) democracy, namely freedom, responsibility (accountability), tolerance, social justice, and equality of opportunity. In line with these values, liberal internationalism believes that any government in a (liberal) democracy desires to stay in office.²⁹⁵ Consequently, Drezner argues that it would be foolish for a (liberal) democratic government to pursue a foreign policy that contravenes these liberal principles. For this reason, liberal internationalists confirm that realism is ill-suited to foreign policy of (liberal) democracies.²⁹⁶ Doyle, for instance, asserts:

[I]n (liberal) democracies, public policy derives its legitimacy from its concordance with liberal principles. Policies not rooted in liberal principles generally fail to sustain long term public support.²⁹⁷

The belief that (liberal) democracies hold different sets of values with regard to foreign policy issues from those held by *realpolitik* statesmen is predicated on the norms that deviate from the democratic peace argument. Ultimately, the majority of the populations of (liberal) democracies are likely to trust fellow (liberal) democratic countries and to prefer co-operation to self-help.²⁹⁸

Further, (liberal) democracies are likely to show strong support for international institutions as a source for promoting democracy and economic interdependence among states.²⁹⁹ It is also expected that (liberal) democracies would support international institutions with military missions, such as humanitarian interventions and multilateral peacekeeping, as a source to promote peace and liberal norms in the international system.³⁰⁰ Policies that are in contrast with liberal values – alliances with unsavoury regimes, or tolerance of human rights abuses to advance the national interest – should register significant opposition.³⁰¹

With regard to the approach of (liberal) democracies to foreign economic policy, Gartzke et al. believe that these countries will realise that free trade is a win-win situation where all participating countries benefit. They will also realise that economic interdependence is a force of peace in the international system.³⁰² Because (liberal) democratic citizens are predicted to care more about absolute gains than about relative gains, there should be majority support for any liberalising measures, given that the economic benefits outweigh the costs.³⁰³ For that reason, (liberal) democracies will pursue and promote *laissez-faire* policies rather than conflict and war in their foreign policy.

In conclusion, according to liberal internationalism, the foreign policy priorities and worldview of (liberal) democracies are that they are cautiously optimistic with regard to the international system. These countries will pursue national interest through international law and they will strive to promote democracy and human rights in the international system.

With regard to the justification and support for the use of force, (liberal) democracies will only use force in self-defence, humanitarian intervention, and the promotion of democratic regime change. On the subject of foreign economic policy, (liberal) democracies indicate the importance of absolute gains and the support for economic interdependence.

Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer, on the other hand, is pessimistic about the foreign policy of states. Because states live in a Hobbesian international system – i.e. they exist in a competitive and potentially conflict-prone environment – Mearsheimer believes that the top priority in the foreign policy of any state would be preserving its territorial integrity, the security of the homeland, and regional hegemony.³⁰⁴ For this reason, it is impossible for governments to trust one another fully; thus, forcing all states to be guided solely by national interest.³⁰⁵ Regarding international institutions, offensive realism believes that such institutions do not play a significant role in the international system. States will justify their actions through self-defence if there is any violation of their sovereignty. States will also use force to contain rising powers and will endure the costs if the adversary suffers.

When looking at foreign economic policy, offensive realism holds that states must be well aware of and understand the distribution of gains accruing from economic co-operation. Offensive realism is wary of the interdependence that could come from a liberal economic order, even if economic integration leads to a balanced distribution of gains. For offensive realism, vulnerability is just a substitute for interdependence, and a loss of economic autonomy together with heightened interstate frictions is employed. Consequently, “will both gain?” is not the question offensive realism asks; instead, it is, “who will gain most?”³⁰⁶

One may assume that, through speeches and policy documents, policymakers make their intentions clear. However, according to Mearsheimer, this statement is problematic because policymakers sometimes lie about their true intentions.³⁰⁷ Since all states operate in an anarchic world, which forces them to provide for their own security, Mearsheimer asserts that the paramount reason leaders lie to their foreign audiences is to gain strategic advantage for their own country. States could thus maximise their prospect for survival by gaining power at the expense of their rivals. They may, however, also use deception. This would entail lying to achieve an advantage over a potential adversary. In a dangerous world, leaders would do whatever is necessary to ensure the survival of their own country.³⁰⁸

Mearsheimer identifies “liberal lies” as one of the techniques used by leaders in (liberal) democracies to justify their actions. Liberal lies are designed to cover up the behaviour of a state when it contradicts the well-developed body of liberal norms that is widely accepted around the world and codified in international law. Liberal democracies – and all other kinds of countries – sometimes act brutally towards other states, or they form alliances with particularly dubious states. When this is the case, the leader of such state will devise a story to tell the people of that state – or the whole world – in an attempt to disguise their illiberal actions with this fabricated idealistic rhetoric.³⁰⁹ In short, elites

usually act like realists and talk like liberals, which invariably necessitates lying. For this reason, Mearsheimer believes that ‘one should be very suspicious of the words that come out of the mouths of policy makers’.³¹⁰

Intelligence Services, Offensive Realism and Liberal Internationalism

Intelligence services comprise one of the oldest professions in the world, and are the key to understanding international relations, global politics, and terrorism fully.³¹¹ Warner defines intelligence services as a specific form of information and an essential aid that allows policymakers to make effective decisions and provide timely warning of events in which the specific government wishes to participate.³¹² Intelligence is however also a form of power that plays a crucial part in “hyper-powerness”, which allows states to project military force on a global basis, allowing them to dominate.³¹³ The term “intelligence” has been used broadly in three different ways:

- Intelligence can be seen as a **process**, which policymakers or operational commanders request, then collect, analyse, and feed the consumers.³¹⁴ In the definition of intelligence reports, “intelligence” refers to the proceedings of intelligence services, including human resources, assets, and financial management.³¹⁵
- Intelligence can also be defined as a **product**. In the past, intelligence was circulated as a piece of paper, but in the contemporary world, the highly confidential information is distributed by means of multilevel secure electronic databases.³¹⁶
- Intelligence services can be seen as **institutions** to deliver diverse services to government.³¹⁷

The above involve efforts to shape the world in addition to merely reporting about it.³¹⁸ We must therefore remember that denial is ‘the black art’ all governments and intelligence services have been perfected a long time ago. Intelligence services are therefore the very opposite of the dictum that gentlemen do not read one another’s mail.³¹⁹

From what has been articulated above, one must remember that there is a definite link between foreign policy and intelligence services. Good quality intelligence and sound political strategising form the basis of successful foreign policy. Historical experiences have however shown that achieving this alignment is not always easy. Consider, for instance, the CIA assessment of the Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) during the lead-up to the Iraq War in 2003. Although the assessment was a crucial factor influencing foreign policy decisions, the accuracy of the assessment was later called into doubt exposing a mismatch between the intelligence given and the real situation in the field. This misalignment had consequences for the US foreign policy goals and its reputation among nations.³²⁰ One can therefore not help but ask, ‘What are the perspectives of liberal internationalism and offensive realism toward covert operations?’

One of the most powerful liberal internationalist contributions that added to the debate on alliance formation in the international system is the democratic peace theory. Democratic

peace theorists, such as Doyle, strongly believe that, if an illegitimate alliance (i.e. intelligence alliance between a [liberal] democratic state and a non-democratic state) had been formed covertly, it does not prove liberal internationalism wrong because citizens of that specific country were not aware of the ‘strange bedfellows’. According to offensive realism, ‘logic flies in the face of the widely held belief in the West that liberal democracies behave differently’³²¹ in initiating covert action than that of non-democratic states. Non-democratic states, as the argument goes, ‘are the real threat to the rules-based order and more generally the chief obstacle to create a peaceful world’³²². But this is not how international politics works. Regime type matters little in a self-help world where states constantly worry about their survival.³²³ The United States is the oldest (liberal) democratic state, for example, but its leaders formed close alliances with non-democratic states. Whether it was the alliance by George H Bush and the CIA with the Panama military dictator, Manuel Noriega, in 1989, or the alliance by George W Bush and the CIA with Jordan, Egypt, Uzbekistan and Syria of hosting black sites,³²⁴ these relations were established covertly to protect the respective administrations from potential public backlash. Even though both Presidents George H Bush and George W Bush were democratically elected by the public, they chose to deviate from the very liberal norms that underpinned their foreign policy. According to offensive realism, there is therefore little room for trust among states in the international system, and alliances are only temporary marriages of convenience: today’s alliance partner might be tomorrow’s enemy.

Into the Future We Go: Expectations of Liberal Internationalism, Offensive Realism and Intelligence Services

One needs to remember that, while the intelligence community serves the interests of politics, it does have a fair amount of autonomy. The purpose of this section is therefore to discuss the outcomes of intelligence services if they conform to the theory of liberal internationalism or offensive realism. The expectations that follow were not arrived at haphazardly, but derive from an examination of the theories advanced in this article.

Actions of intelligence services through the lens of liberal internationalism

When analysing the actions of intelligence services through the lens of liberal internationalism, the following characteristics can be expected:

- Relations between intelligence services will predominantly be based on ideological considerations, and the pursuit of national security will predominately proceed through the prism of liberal ideology;
- A high degree of trust among intelligence services from (liberal) democracies should be evident;
- A high degree of mutual respect will exist among the intelligence services of (liberal) democracies;
- There will be co-operation between the intelligence services of (liberal) democracies to prevent external or internal dangers;
- Important information will be shared with one another, especially those concerning dangers to one another’s vital interests;

- There will be alliances between liberal democratic intelligence services;
- The intentions of one group would be clear to their allies; and
- The foreign policy rhetoric and the actions of intelligence services will correspond.

Actions of intelligence services through the lens of offensive realism

In contrast, when viewing actions of intelligence services through the lens of offensive realism, different characteristics emerge:

- Relations between different intelligence services will be based on interest, and not on ideological considerations;
- Intelligence services will regard national security as being a primary objective;
- Intelligence services will throw each other to the wolves to excel in the international system;
- There will be little room for trust because of the uncertainty with regard to each other's intentions;
- There is a possibility of temporary alliances;
- Leaders will tell liberal lies to justify realist actions of intelligence services; and
- Rhetoric of foreign policy will not correspond with the actions of intelligence services.

Formation of an Intelligence Alliance between Israel and South Africa

The cases of Israel and post-apartheid South Africa present us with examples of (liberal) democracies. Although some observers might question the inclusion of Israel as a (liberal) democracy, Michael Doyle, the pre-eminent proponent of liberal international thought (particularly democratic peace theory), forthrightly codes Israel as a *liberal* democracy since 1949.³²⁵ There is, accordingly, nothing controversial in including Israel and post-apartheid South Africa as (liberal) democracies. Although Amstutz classifies apartheid South Africa as a 'partial liberal democratic state',³²⁶ it is patently obvious that apartheid South Africa fell far short of the essential features of a (liberal) democratic state.³²⁷

What do we gain by including these two (liberal) democracies (to wit Israel and post-apartheid South Africa) and one non-democratic state (i.e. apartheid South Africa) in this article? The inclusion of apartheid South Africa as one of the cases to be probed provides us with a hard test for both theories. If liberal internationalism is correct, Israel and post-apartheid South Africa would act in a similar fashion, with no discernible difference in foreign policy rhetoric and outcomes among the intelligence services of the three states (Israel, non-democratic apartheid South Africa, and post-apartheid South Africa), as against this, apartheid South Africa would have acted in markedly different ways; thus, following a realist script. On the other hand, if offensive realism is correct, the cases (Israel, apartheid South Africa and post-apartheid South Africa) would act in markedly similar ways, regardless of the differences in political ideology.³²⁸

As we explore the intricate interplay between foreign policy rhetoric and intelligence co-operation, it becomes clear that the relationship is seldom as clear-cut as a matter of overt and covert strategies. As opposed to solely viewing these terms through a black-

and-white lens, it is important to point out that the study, on which this article is based, acknowledged the need for a nuanced analytical framework right from the start. Even though the researchers initially discussed perspectives of liberal internationalism and offensive realism in terms of foreign policy, it is of the utmost importance to recognise that real-world situations often lead to intricate scenarios that challenge simple categorisation. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this section is to focus on the alliance formation between the Israeli and South African intelligence services. After each case study, two primary objectives are pursued:

- Firstly, an attempt is made to determine whether liberal internationalism or offensive realism best describes the logic behind the alliance formed between the intelligence services of these two countries.
- Secondly, the researchers aim to determine whether intelligence services abide by the foreign policy rhetoric of their countries (with specific reference to alliance formation) or whether “they have a chance to establish their own foreign policy”?

*The Mossad and BOSS and NIS Alliance (Apartheid Era)*³²⁹

When focussing on the relations between Israel and apartheid South Africa, the 1960s is indeed characterised as an era of the decline of relations between these two countries. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main factors in this deterioration were ‘Israel’s moral and principled objection to South Africa’s racial policy and political considerations’.³³⁰ Golda Meir, Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister at the time, even depicted Israeli opposition towards apartheid South Africa by delivering a speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in which she declared that Israel does not condone apartheid, and pledged that Israel had ‘taken all necessary steps to prevent Israeli arms from reaching South Africa, directly or indirectly’.³³¹ Although she maintained that this is why the relations between the two countries deteriorated, some scholars tend to disagree.³³²

Scholars, such as Sanders, however strongly believe that the SA apartheid policy was not the reason for the deterioration of relations between these two countries.³³³ The actual reason is that Israel placed increased importance on its new relations with decolonised African states. According to Polakow-Suransky, the involvement of Israel in instigating relations with the involved African countries was because the Jewish state, unlike the United States and the Soviet Union, did not come with ideological demands nor demanded African states to take sides in the Cold War. As a result, African leaders regarded Israel as a fellow small nation facing comparable challenges.³³⁴ Nevertheless, when these decolonised states decided in 1973, after the Yom Kippur War, to end their relations with Israel, Jerusalem turned to Pretoria in the hope of forming an alliance.³³⁵ However, even though *The Guardian* reported that Israeli relations with South Africa started to strengthen after the Yom Kippur War,³³⁶ there is sufficient evidence, dating back to the 1960s, which suggests that the intelligence services of these two countries already enjoyed a friendly and “understandable” relationship before Golda Meir’s speech at the UNGA.³³⁷

While Meir staunchly advocated in the 1960s that Israel was not a friend of apartheid South Africa, Mossad and the most feared SA arm of the security apparatus, the BOSS,

already had a deep friendship between them.³³⁸ According to Thomas, the BOSS matched Mossad in blackmail, sabotage, forgery, kidnapping, prisoner interrogation, psychological warfare and assassinations. Like Mossad, the BOSS had a free hand in the way it dealt with its opponents.³³⁹ Subsequently, the two intelligence services quickly became bedfellows because they truly believed that both countries 'are situated in a predominantly hostile world inhabited' [by hostile people].³⁴⁰ Mossad and the BOSS therefore realised that, if both countries were to survive in a hostile world, they needed to help each other with the making of nuclear weapons. The first step had been the export of uranium ore from South Africa to Israel.³⁴¹

Although the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) implemented a policy which stipulated that no uranium oxide of bomb-making proportions would ever be available in the Middle East, this did not stop Mossad.³⁴² According to Sanders, more than 600 tonnes of uranium oxide were exported to Israel between 1961 and 1976.³⁴³ Thomas stipulates that Mossad and the BOSS were given the responsibility for the numerous export operations. The shipments were carried on commercial EL AL flights from Johannesburg to Tel Aviv, and were listed as 'agricultural machinery'.³⁴⁴ Rehman and Bukhari add that relations between the two countries became crucial when South Africa allowed Israeli scientists to be present when South Africa tested a crude nuclear device on a remote island in the Indian Ocean.³⁴⁵ In return, Israel supplied the SA army with substantial quantities of US-manufactured arms.³⁴⁶

After the dismantlement of the BOSS in 1980, the NIS became the new foreign intelligence service of South Africa. According to Barnard, Mossad continued to show total discontent with regard to the Israeli non-alignment policy.³⁴⁷

We [i.e. NIS] received excellent information from the Israelis about the political, economic and strategic situation in the Middle East and North Africa and, in turn, we provided information about southern Africa.³⁴⁸

In short, Barnard assures the reader that the relations between the NIS and Mossad were not determined by ideological preferences, but rather by the exchange of mutually beneficial information.³⁴⁹

Evaluation

As seen in the Israeli foreign policy rhetoric, the country wholly opposed the SA apartheid policy. According to liberal internationalism, the core reason for the Israeli disregard of the SA racial policy and political considerations was therefore, that it was in total contradiction with the Israeli domestic and international policies. If the liberal internationalism argument was therefore, accurate, Israel would not have initiated military³⁵⁰ or intelligence relations with the apartheid regime. This was, however, not the case.

From an offensive realism point of view, the Israeli foreign policy elites were well aware that there might be a possibility of an international backlash if the news were made public that Israel and apartheid South Africa had initiated a close security relationship. The Israeli government therefore decided to mislead the international community by telling

liberal lies in the hope of secretly facilitating close military and intelligence relations with South Africa. These actions were in accordance with the theoretical argument of offensive realism according to which Mearsheimer articulates, '[w]hen (liberal) democracies form alliances with particularly dubious states, state leaders will try to disguise their illiberal relations with a fabricated idealistic rhetoric'.³⁵¹ As seen in Golda Meir's speech at the UNGA, her rhetoric was in contradiction to the beneficial friendship between Mossad and the BOSS. Interestingly, Thomas articulates that, while Meir condemned the SA apartheid policy in the presence of the international community, she was well aware of the close working relationship between the intelligence services of the two countries.³⁵² Even though the case study presented above suggests that Mossad disregarded the Israeli foreign policy rhetoric towards apartheid South Africa, one cannot help but ask whether other instances existed where Mossad initiated intelligence relations with non-democratic intelligence services. To answer this question, one needs to consider the intelligence relations between Mossad and the Chinese Central Investigations Department (CCP).

At first, the Mossad and CCP regarded one another as adversaries during the late 1950s. In fact, the CCP perceived Israel as a 'pawn in the hands of Washington' as one of the reasons why the CCP and Mossad clashed.³⁵³ However, according to Thomas, this soon changed into a mutually beneficial relationship after both intelligence services agreed that they shared a common interest in curtailing Russian influence on the African continent.³⁵⁴ The proposal from the CCP to ally against a common enemy, the KGB (the Russian Committee for State Security), was eagerly accepted by Mossad.³⁵⁵ Thomas articulates that the CCP began sharing information with Mossad about the Arab movement in and out of Africa. Mossad kept its promise, and helped China in Sudan, where the Soviet Union had established strong relations with President Nimeri's military government.³⁵⁶ When the dictator refused to become completely dependent on the Russians, the KGB however planned a coup. Mossad informed the CCP, who told Nimeri. He immediately expelled all Russian diplomats, and suspended Soviet Bloc aid schemes.³⁵⁷

To conclude, the evidence presented above supports Mearsheimer's theoretical argument that 'one should be very suspicious of the words that come out of the mouths of policymakers' and 'today's enemy can be tomorrow's alliance partner'.³⁵⁸ Not only did Mearsheimer's proposition suggest that Israeli leaders would tell liberal lies to hide their intelligence relations with South Africa and China, but it also argued that states ally on the basis of the convergence of strategic interests.

The Mossad–SSA Intelligence Liaison (Post-Apartheid Era)

When focussing on the post-apartheid SA foreign policy towards Israel, it becomes apparent that the African National Congress (ANC) government has illustrated (on numerous occasions) discontent towards the Jewish State.³⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, *The Times of Israel* reported that the former SA ambassador to Israel, Ismail Coovadia, accused the Jewish State of practising apartheid.³⁶⁰ In addition, it would appear that the previous Minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, followed the same line of argument when she proclaimed, 'the struggle of the people of Palestine is our struggle'. Nkoana-Mashabane concluded,

‘[the] ministers of South Africa do not visit Israel currently.’³⁶¹ Even the Jewish Board of Deputies that we engage with, they know why our ministers are not going to Israel.’³⁶² If the DIRCO perspective towards Israel was correct, how does one explain the agreement by the SSA to align itself with Mossad on at least two different occasions?

The first occasion occurred in May 2012 when Mossad discovered that Hezbollah (with the support of Iran) was planning an attack in Africa. After Mossad presented the facts to the SA national security elites, IOL News reported that the SSA agreed to co-operate with Mossad to prevent this attack from occurring. ‘As a result of this operation, where South Africa also played a very important role, Iranian officials were arrested in Kenya with explosives.’³⁶³

The second occasion materialised when Mossad informed the SSA that its other concerns in Africa were the Rwandan rebel group, M23; the Somali Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab; and Global Jihad. According to the leaked secret report, SSA officials replied with the assurance ‘that the SSA was ready to work together on these issues’ but would be motivated by ‘more comprehensive information from the start’.³⁶⁴

In conclusion, even though the ANC government proclaimed negative rhetoric toward the Israeli government, we cannot deviate from the finding that the SSA is co-operating with Mossad.³⁶⁵ It would appear that, in the shadowy world of espionage, ‘intelligence liaison is valuable because it can be conducted quietly and is not subject to the whimsical dictates of diplomatic posturing’.³⁶⁶

Evaluation

These case studies of post-apartheid South Africa are explained much better by offensive realism than liberal internationalism. According to the tenets of offensive realism, SA intelligence relations indicate that we cannot underestimate the truth that intelligence services, no matter the prevailing political ideology, will co-operate with one another to accomplish their own national interests successfully. In fact, there are many instances where SA intelligence services ignored the rhetoric of policymakers and decided to initiate relations with so-called ‘dubious states’.³⁶⁷ Consider, for instance, the SA stance towards the Soviet Union and Russia. After the apartheid struggle, it became evident that the ANC government perceived the Russians as allies in the international system.³⁶⁸ After all, the Soviets provided valuable assistance to the ANC during the fight against the oppressive apartheid regime.³⁶⁹ Al Jazeera’s revelation that South Africa and Russia are co-operating extensively with each other in the sphere of espionage therefore came as no surprise.³⁷⁰ The latter behaviour however becomes all the more interesting if we compare it with the accumulated wisdom of Niël Barnard³⁷¹. As the former head of the SA National Intelligence Service, Barnard articulates that, even though the Soviet Union was deemed one of the biggest national security threats to apartheid South Africa, it did not deter the NIS from initiating (in absolute secrecy) ‘a mutually beneficial relationship with a country that had once been a sworn enemy’.³⁷²

To conclude, although there is no nexus between the foreign policies of Israel and South Africa, and the actions of the intelligence services of the two countries, Pateman is of the opinion that, in the world of intelligence services, this is not a new phenomenon. As intelligence services are on the cutting edge of current affairs, ‘they have a chance to establish their own foreign policy’.³⁷³

Conclusion

Based on the historical and more recent cases presented above, one can conclude that the offensive realism argument, i.e. ‘there are no real friends or foes, only marriages of convenience’³⁷⁴, is more suitable in terms of explaining the formation of an intelligence alliance between Israel and South Africa than the opinion of liberal internationalism that (liberal) democratic states regard each other as trustworthy friends in the international system. This goes against the argument posed by liberal internationalism that, in the domain of international politics, (liberal) democratic states are least likely to form alliances with non-democracies because of the conflicting domestic political values and foreign policy interests non-democracies exhibit.

Although the research and application of International Relations theories to Intelligence Studies are limited, it is expected that we will see more co-operation between the Israeli Mossad and the South African SSA due to the emergence of new enemies and terrorist organisations. Because the security and survival of (liberal) democratic states are being threatened by terrorists, such as the Islamic State (IS), Mearsheimer would suggest that we could expect temporary alliances being formed between Mossad, SSA, and other foreign intelligence services with the goal of ensuring state survival in an anarchic international system.

To conclude, what was the key finding of the study on which this article is based?

Early in the article, it was stipulated that liberal internationalism leads us to expect that the ideologies of states inform their interests. For this reason, (liberal) democracies would rather be inclined to form close friendships with one another due to the internal and external values they share. This theoretical argument has however been challenged by the alliance formed between the Israeli Mossad and the SA intelligence services. In the case studies of the Mossad and the BOSS and NIS alliance (apartheid era), and the Mossad–SSA intelligence liaison (post-apartheid era), it was shown that these intelligence services did not hesitate to form close alliances with other states (regardless of the political ideology) to advance their national interests in the international system. In the study, it was established that these alliance formations lean towards the theoretical arguments of offensive realism, namely that the behaviour of states is less likely to be based on the ideology and form of government of other states and more likely to be based on national interest. This finding provides us with a clear answer that, in the world of intelligence, alliance formation is focussed on advancing national interest – regardless of the political ideology of a state.

ENDNOTES

- ²⁸⁴ This article stems from the first author's master's dissertation, with the second author acting as the supervisor at the University of the Free State. Mr Swart's MA dissertation was titled 'Is it what you say or is it what you do? Liberal Internationalism, Offensive Realism, and Intelligence Services'.
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- ²⁸⁶ Dr Eben Coetzee is the subject head of the Department of Political Studies and Governance at the University of the Free State. He is interested in issues relating to nuclear proliferation, nuclear deterrence, nuclear terrorism, structural realist theory, the nature of theory, and the history and philosophy of science. He has published several accredited articles and book chapters on issues related to nuclear weapons, nuclear deterrence, nuclear terrorism, war, and IR theory. He is an NRF-rated researcher.
- ²⁸⁷ The theories used in this article obviously do not exhaust the entire corpus of theoretical knowledge on the alliance formation and foreign policy behaviour of states and their intelligence services. Given, however, the predominance of the two, this article focusses on offensive realism and liberal internationalism, while acknowledging that other theories might also make significant contributions.
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- ³²⁷ Even though the historical context of liberal internationalism in South Africa is indeed an interesting historical context, it was not included in this article. However, for readers interested in exploring this topic further, M Cardo, *The Liberal Tradition in South Africa: Past and Present* offers valuable insights into the historical development of liberal beliefs within South Africa.
- ³²⁸ M Rabie, *Israel and South Africa: The Ties that Bind* (Dearborn: First Publishing Corp, 1988). It is important to point out that the historical connections between apartheid-South Africa and Israel, along with the ANC's alignment with the Palestine Liberation Organization, undoubtedly had an influence on their state relations after apartheid. While this article mainly focusses on specific aspects of (apartheid) South Africa and Israel's intelligence ties, a comprehensive exploration of the historical background and its implications would require a separate and extensive examination. For readers interested in delving into this history, Rabie, *Israel and South Africa: The Ties that Bind* provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical links.
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