

EXCURSUS I

THOMAS LAND on BLACK AFRICA LOOKING TO ISRAEL

The signs of action are unmistakable, although no one wants to be seen to make the first move. Several African countries are likely to restore diplomatic relations shortly with Israel, and they may well be followed in the coming year by many others.

This would end Israel's virtually complete diplomatic isolation in the Third World, create a setback for South Africa, which is at present Israel's only major trading partner on that continent, and strengthen international approval of Egypt's Mideast peace initiative. More important for the Africans, it would re-establish their independence in international affairs from their Arab neighbors to the north. And, more important for the world, it would give them a measure of influence to moderate the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Until the Yom Kippur War of October, 1973, Israel maintained close ties with more than thirty black African countries. They accepted it as a still developing country born out of violent struggle against British imperialism. Israel's development aid schemes were the envy of the world. It had much valuable experience to share in spheres of urgent importance to Africans, such as agricultural science, construction, public health administration, and fisheries.

Black Africans had resisted intense pressure from the Arab north to take sides in the Mideast conflict. Their impartiality crumbled during the '73 war, when Israel came to occupy a slice of African territory in Egypt. Up to five African countries a day then broke diplomatic relations with Israel. By the time that territory was returned in March, 1974, black Africa's new political loyalties appeared a permanent reality, supported by generous promises from the north of economic assistance to offset the sudden rise of world oil prices, the Arab "oil weapon," whose use has been

troublesomely escalating ever since.

In theory, black Africa was to enlist the support of the Arab north in unseating the white minority administration of South Africa in exchange for the diplomatic isolation of Israel. In practice, South Africa gained by strengthening its ties with an increasingly friendless Israel while it went on trading with the Arabs as well as the rest of the world. The only losers were the Africans, who thus relinquished their sole source of "untied" development assistance from a genuinely color-blind donor, and Israel, whose philosophy of Zionism became officially equated with apartheid at many world forums.

Despite their promises, the wealthy Mideast oil exporters failed to make economic concessions to black Africa to correspond with the relentless world fuel price increases. This has made black Africa's fragile economies the first to be crippled by the oil weapon.

LAST YEAR'S SEPARATE PEACE between Egypt and Israel was therefore welcomed by many African policymakers as a graceful escape route from what they have come to regard bitterly as a ruthless diplomatic trap. Formal relations between states are not established or broken lightly; and certainly no influential African country would wish to risk its "radical" reputation by restoring official contacts with Israel alone. Hence the cautious diplomatic feelers currently extended by many African capitals in search of coordinated action. The trend may well begin in East Africa, which is obviously the most concerned with the success of the Mideast peace process and also the most affected by the fall of the Amin regime in Uganda, hitherto the most vocal African advocate of the Arab cause.

In the meantime, black Africa's unofficial contacts with Israel are flourishing. Israeli development advisors are engaged in more than twenty African countries, but this time in "private" rather than "public" capacity. Their government, which is very sensitive about the image it projects to Africa, publicly maintains that any initiative for resumed diplomatic relations must come from those who broke them. But its diplomats will in-

form anyone who cares to listen that Israel's consulate in South Africa was upgraded to full embassy status only after black Africa's change of heart in '73, implying it could be downgraded again.

Black Africa's fresh thinking on the Mideast first came into the open when the majority of its heads of state, gathered at the Monrovia conference of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) not long ago, refused to "punish" Egypt, despite Arab demands, for its separate peace with Israel. During the conference *The Express* of Liberia, the host country's only Sunday newspaper, called on African countries to resume relations with Israel without further delay. "With rapprochement now a political fact of life between Egypt and Israel," it argued, "member countries of the OAU no longer feel bound to maintain a diplomatic break with a country which can offer much in the transfer of technology to them."

Several members of Parliament in Kenya are advocating an early resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel. Zaire and Israel recently announced the resumption of trade union links, a development seen by both as a step leading to full diplomatic relations. Black Africa is thus likely to follow its own economic interests but may well achieve a great deal more. Given the political isolation of Egypt and Israel and the military impotence of all the other parties directly involved in the Mideast conflict, black Africa now stands a chance of reversing its traditional relationship with the Arab north by extending an influence over events beyond the Sahara and the Red Sea. It could use that influence to encourage a dialogue between the hostile forces and thereby broaden the peace process into a just peace for all the peoples locked in the struggle.

Thomas Land writes on world affairs from European capitals.

Quote/Unquote

How's That Again?

...The weaves are first shown in their standard forms, then lesser known and unknown techniques are developed and explained in detail. ...

--a Scribner's catalog

EXCURSUS II

ALBERT ANTREI on PAUSE AT AGINCOURT

Battles are historically ephemeral. Take Agincourt, for instance.

There is a quiet dignity about Agincourt, in Picardy, where over five hundred years ago French knighthood lost its flower in a sudden onslaught of English frost. In a land that has all too many military cemeteries, one of the bloodiest battles ever recorded was fought here on October 24, 1415. To hold his lands in France against a rising French nationalism, Henry V of England stormed ashore at Harfleur, which he took by surprise in bloody combat. Attempting then to march to Calais to establish winter quarters, Henry's 14,000 men, 85 per cent of whom were archers, were intercepted at Agincourt by a force of French knights and their men-at-arms, numbering, it is believed, close to 50,000 in all.

Playing it coolly, Henry deployed his "infantry" of pikemen and swordsmen behind sharpened stakes, driven in the ground at an angle, to discourage a French cavalry charge. He flanked these troops with 12,000 bowmen. Numerically superior and swathed in heavy armor, the French pitted romantic tradition against Henry's tactical daring, and Henry taught the flower of French chivalry their fourth hard lesson on the field of battle: that military techniques had changed. Three times before they had been taught that lesson, once by the Flemish communes at Kortrijk and twice by the English at Crécy and Poitiers.

Ten thousand French dead and their horses littered the fields and woods of Picardy on that day in 1415, near the village the French called *Azincourt*. Nearly 2,000 Englishmen died there also --some 12,000 in all on a few hectares of fertile farmland.

THERE ARE NO MAJOR HIGHWAY SIGNS along the secondary road between Abbeville and Saint-Omer today to put the traveler on notice that he is approaching a historic