by J. Coleman Kitchen, Jr.

1962. Zaire (then known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) establishes diplomatic relations with Israel.

September 1963. Commander-in-chief of the Congolese armed forces Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (future Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko) receives his jump wings after taking a paratrooper training course in Israel along with 218 other Congolese.

October 4, 1973. In the course of a long speech delivered at the UN General Assembly two days before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur Arab-Israeli war, President Mobutu announces his decision to break relations with Israel: “Zaire must choose between a friendly country, Israel, and a brother country, Egypt. Now, between a friend and a brother, the choice is clear. And our decisions are taken in complete independence and outside all pressures.” [As late as 1972, Israel had 32 diplomatic missions in Africa. As of 1981, only five African states—Egypt, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Swaziland—had official diplomatic ties with Israel.]

November 1981. Under the headline “Israel Begins an African Comeback,” Newsweek reports in its November 30 “Periscope” feature: “[L]ast week Israel’s Defense Minister Ariel Sharon led a group of five top-level officials on a secret tour of several capitals in western and central Africa. The message of the mission was that Israel is ready to provide economic and military aid to possible targets of further Libyan adventures in exchange for closer cooperation or renewed diplomatic relations with the Africans.”

December 2, 1981. On the final day of a “working visit” to Washington, Mobutu recalls his 1973 assertion that relations with Israel would remain broken “until Israel gives back the occupied territories to Egypt,” but says that there are now “no more problems” because Egypt and Israel have diplomatic relations and the last piece of occupied Egyptian territory is scheduled to be returned in April 1982. As far as timing is concerned, he says that reestablishing relations with Israel would not be a “difficult problem for Zaire . . . we could do it immediately,” but “Zaire is not alone in Africa [and there] must be consultation [with other African countries] . . . I will wait to see what the other ones are going to do.”

May 14, 1982. At a congress of the ruling Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (MPR) in Kinshasa, Mobutu announces his government’s decision to resume relations with Israel.

An IBA broadcast from Jerusalem adds these details and observations: “[The] announcement by the Zairian government about the resumption of relations with Israel was preceded by an exchange of messages between President Mobutu and the [Israeli] prime minister and the defense minister . . . An Israeli diplomat has for some months been stationed in a foreign embassy in Kinshasa and has handled relations between Israel and Zaire. The spokesman of the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, Avi Pazner, welcomed the Zairian decision and noted this was an important development in Israel’s relations with Africa. He emphasized [that] Israel calls on other countries on the African continent also to resume relations of friendship and cooperation with Israel. Our correspondent has learned the Zairian president is now trying to persuade some of his colleagues to follow in his footsteps. The French government and President Mitterrand are also trying to persuade African countries which had in the past been under French rule to resume relations with Israel. Two days ago, Zaire announced it no longer wanted economic aid from the United States. Washington had offered $64 million in economic and military aid. However, during a Congressional hearing, testimony was presented about corruption in the Zairian administration along with hints the president had used U.S. aid funds for his own benefit. Israeli sources in Washington told the UPI correspondent [that] Israel would not extend economic aid to Zaire but it would be ready to send volunteers along the lines of the U.S. Peace Corps. About six months ago, . . . Sharon signed an agreement on cooperation in Zaire.”
May 15, 1982. Mobutu’s special envoy, Nimyaidika Ngimbi, arrives in Israel for a three-day visit, bringing a verbal message for Prime Minister Menachem Begin "intended to reinforce the declaration on resuming political relations between the two countries." According to the Tel Aviv daily Ma’ariv, the envoy says that "we are expecting mutual cooperation on all possible issues—in the military, economic, and agricultural spheres. As befitting two friendly countries, we do not reject any sphere."

May 16, 1982. During a radio interview in Jerusalem, Presidential Envoy Nimyaidika Ngimbi is asked if the new Zairian embassy will be located in Jerusalem. He replies: "Yes, why not? Since it is the capital of the state of Israel." Later in the day, the Zairian envoy meets with Minister Sharon and then Prime Minister Begin. According to an Israeli radio report of the latter meeting, Begin invites Mobutu to visit Jerusalem and expresses his own readiness to visit Kinshasa in the autumn, after his leg heals; he says that Israel will help Zaire to the best of its ability.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Yitzhak Shamir says in a radio interview that Mobutu’s decision "will at once raise Israel's prestige in the international arena, in all international organizations and institutions," but declines to speculate about which other African countries may resume relations with Israel in the near future: "I would not like to embarrass any African heads of state. I can only say there are several countries whose leaders have in their hearts made the decision to take this step and they are thinking about it and discussing the effective date. I assume the Zairian president’s decision will accelerate their decision."

May 17, 1982. In Washington, State Department spokesman Alan Romberg welcomes Zaire’s decision to renew diplomatic relations with Israel, but reserves comment on Zaire's apparent decision to locate its embassy in Jerusalem, saying "this is a bilateral affair concerning only Zaire and Israel."

May 18, 1982. Saudi Arabia severs diplomatic relations with Zaire.

May 19, 1982. Tunisia recalls its ambassador to Zaire for "consultation" "as a first step." Zaire’s embassy in Paris issues a statement declaring that Zaire has never said or decided that its embassy in Israel would be in Jerusalem, and affirming that the recent decision on the Middle East contains only three points: "[reaffirmation] of recognition of the Palestinian people’s right to have a sovereign state; maintenance of Zaire’s recognition in 1975 of the PLO as the Palestinian people’s sole representative; and the resumption of normal diplomatic relations with the Jewish state."

May 20, 1982. An editorial in the Algiers newspaper Ash-Sha'b condemns "the Zairian defection" as "more than a mere stab in the back for Arab-African solidarity or a blow to the Arab and African liberation movement." The analysis: "This is no not only because of the intensity of financial and political relations between Mobutu’s regime and certain Arab Gulf states and the Rabat regime but also because Zaire's policy carries within it characteristics of Sadat’s policy . . . If Sadat in the recent past acted foolishly and dissented from Arab unanimity in order to establish a separate peace with the Zionist entity at the expense of the Arab nation's number one cause, Mobutu is today following the same path at the expense of Arab-African solidarity and without any regard for the consequences of his actions for Arab-African relations."

Qatar severs diplomatic relations with Zaire. AZAP, the official Zairian news agency, issues a report summarizing President Mobutu's response to "negative international reactions" regarding his decision to reestablish relations with Israel. Some excerpts: "[N]o state in the world has the right to prevent Zaire, a free and sovereign state, from freely shaping its foreign policy, thus exercising fully its national and international sovereignty. That is why, on October 4, 1973, at the United Nations, this sovereignty was publicly and solemnly proclaimed when, through the voice of their president, the Zairian people decided to sever relations with Tel Aviv. This sovereign decision was dictated by the fact that the African land of Egypt—I repeat, the African land of Egypt—was occupied by the Jewish state . . . At that time, Zaire was highly praised not only for its political sense and the shrewdness of its analysis, but also for the courage and foresight of its leader. But since April 25, [1982,] following the same logic and consistency, Zaire has noted . . . that the reasons for breaking relations with Israel are no longer valid . . .

"[W]hen Zaire took that historic position in 1973, it did not mention Arab land, but African land of Egypt, which happens to be an Arab state . . . Therefore, Zaire cannot help but deplore the reactions in African capitals after its decision to restore diplomatic relations with Israel. So much guile and pure cowardice coupled with inconsistency cannot bring anybody to take Africa seriously . . . Zaire feels sad to note the puerile assurance of all those who in the past shouted against colonialism and neocolonialism whenever any Western country's attitude smacked of the least interference in the internal affairs of any country, but which today in the face of massive interference of the Arabs in the politics of a sovereign state have nothing to say, but only follow the leader of the slave caravan with his whip and turban. Did we fight European colonialism and neocolonialism in the past only to stick out our necks today to the yoke of Arab neoslavery? . . ."

"From the reactions received, we now know that Afro-Arab solidarity is bait, a fool's trap. In fact, this solidarity is the politics of the locomotive and the railway cars they want to impose on us, the Arab countries being the locomotive and we the cars. In such relations, we will have no initiative: when the locomotive stops, the cars stop. And when the locomotive moves again, the cars blindly
line up behind it on the rails . . . The disgraceful petrodollar maneuvers initiated can no longer be successful, for Zaire's policies are not linked to the oil barrel. Zaire is saying this loudly, while others are struggling with it in their minds and do not have the courage to express it. Those people should not forget that the Arab 'reprisals' against what they consider an attack on their interests is, curiously enough, only directed against a Black country. All over the world, quite a number of countries keep both the goat and the cabbage: They keep the Jewish cabbage as well as the Arab goat without being 'sanctioned' . . .

May 21, 1982. Davidkimche, director general of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presides over the opening of the Israeli embassy in Kinshasa. AZAP reports that he stresses that "the friendly ties that always have existed between the Israeli and Zairian peoples . . . originated from the history of the two peoples, one persecuted by colonialism and the other by anti-Semitism that led to the mass killing of Jews during World War II." Moshe Itan, previously director of the Israeli interest section in the Canadian embassy in Kinshasa, becomes chargé d'affaires.

Tripoli radio reports that Libya intends to close its People's Bureau in Zaire, and that the Arab Steadfastness and Confrontation Front has issued a statement denouncing the Zairian action and calling on Zaire's people to overthrow the country's regime.

May 23, 1982. The Algerian daily al-Moudjahid accuses the United States of encouraging Zaire's renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel in order to sabotage the Organization of African Unity summit scheduled for August in Tripoli, and predicts that the Zairian move will be condemned at the conference.

May 24, 1982. AZAP reports that Arab League Secretary-General Chadli al-Ayari has asked OAU Secretary-General Edem Kodjo to oppose Zaire's decision. In its commentary, AZAP argues that the Arab League has no power to dictate OAU policy; that the "exercise of sovereignty by an OAU member is not a matter for the OAU"; that "within the OAU there is neither a resolution nor an injunction binding member states not to renew relations with Israel"; and that "the Israelis themselves know that Zaire's embassy will be established in Tel Aviv."

May 25, 1982. Libyan leader Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi condemns Zaire's action as "a cheap service to racists in Africa and occupied Palestine." He warns that "any African state following the example of Zaire would most certainly find itself on the losing side; all assistance to it would be cut off, any support to it would stop and it would be fought economically and politically."

May 28, 1982. At a Nairobi news conference, Arab League Secretary-General Klibi announces the start of a diplomatic initiative by his organization to remind black African nations of Israel's "strategic alliance" with South Africa and to encourage them to maintain African-Arab solidarity by not restoring relations with Israel as Zaire has done. The first stage of the initiative, which is to include visits by Arab League officials to at least 18 African countries, is to culminate in a special meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Tunis on June 12-14.


June 1, 1982. The Kuwaiti daily Al-Watan reports that the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) has frozen two $15 million loans to Zaire and has called for rapid repayment by Zaire of a $10.5 million loan. The newspaper cites Bank President Chaddi al-Ayari as saying that overall Arab aid to Zaire to date has amounted to nearly $500 million.

June 5, 1982. Two senior officials from President Mobutu's office arrive in Israel to deal with the technical details of restoring ties between the two countries. They reiterate Zaire's decision to locate its embassy in Tel Aviv.

June 19, 1982. The New York Times' Alan Cowell reports from Kinshasa that the arrival in March 1982 of a five-man team of Israeli military advisors tasked with retraining the President's personal bodyguard had been "the worst-kept secret in Kinshasa."

July 12, 1982. Mbuzi Nsomi Leewanabi is named as Zaire's ambassador to Israel.

July 19, 1982. Israel announces that Prime Minister Begin will visit Zaire in August if developments in the Lebanese conflict permit, and that Mobutu is scheduled to visit Israel in September.

August 18, 1982. Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports from Jerusalem that Begin has decided to postpone his official visit to Zaire until mid-October because of events in Lebanon, following a previous postponement at President Mobutu's request.

September 1982. Le Canard Enchainé (Paris) reports that Israeli army officers will henceforth protect President Mobutu and train his personal guard, and observes that this development will not be welcomed by French arms dealing circles because the Israelis will probably encourage Zaire to buy Israeli rather than French arms.

October 1982. Begin's visit to Zaire is again postponed this time due to the illness (and subsequent death in November) of his wife.

October 25, 1982. AZAP reports that two Israeli generals and two colonels, described by the agency as Minister of Defense Sharon's closest aides, met that day with Mobutu in his home village of Gbadolite to discuss Zairian-Israeli cooperation, including a possible increase in Israeli military assistance.

November 4, 1982. The Economist's intelligence weekly Foreign Report states that Zaire has agreed to buy from Israel several million dollars worth of arms, mostly captured from the PLO in Lebanon, and Israeli officers will teach the Zairians how to use the weapons, even though it is unclear how cash-short Zaire will pay for the arms.

November 29, 1982. Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Shamir arrives in Zaire, accompanied by an entourage of 85 officials, businessmen, and technicians. After being greeted with a reception described by The New York Times' William E. Farrell as the kind "normally accorded to heads of state," Shamir...
meets with Zaire’s State Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Kamanda wa Kamanda. Major General Avraham Tamir, who is accompanying Shamir, meets with Zairian Secretary of State for National Defense and Territorial Security Vice Admiral Lomponda wa Botende.

November 30, 1982. Shamir and President Mobutu confer aboard the presidential yacht. In an interview with members of the Israeli press later in the day, Mobutu describes his country’s recognition of Israel as “a matter of principle”: “Zaire holds the view that Israel has fulfilled the condition [restoration of occupied Egyptian territory] which Zaire had publicly set [as a prerequisite for resumption of relations].” Zaire expects “nothing” from Israel in return, and wants to develop its relations with Israel on a basis of mutual respect, not bargaining. He emphasizes that Zaire continues to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people; calls for the “recognition and respect of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign state under the leadership of the PLO”; and advocates the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon. Other highlights of the interview:

- “In its desire to safeguard its territorial integrity and the security of its people, Zaire has undertaken to modernize its armed forces with the assistance of friendly countries.”
- “It is wrong to assert that Israel alone gives it military aid. . . . France is training our paratroopers; China trains our commandos; Belgium takes care of the infantry; and Israel is in charge of the special presidential guard. The efforts of all are appreciated by the Zairian authorities.”
- “What goes on between Israel and South Africa falls within their sovereignty,” but Zaire does not maintain diplomatic relations with South Africa and “will continue to lend its total support in all forms” to Namibia’s SWAPO.

December 1, 1982. No communique is issued in connection with the Shamir visit. However, in a press conference before his departure, Shamir declares (1) that Israel will cooperate with Zaire in the agricultural and technical fields, and says that cooperation may be expanded to other sectors; (2) that he has offered to open a mobile center in Zaire to teach agricultural techniques; (3) that he has invited Israeli military experts to Zaire to modernize its armed forces with the assistance of friendly countries; (4) that Zaire will not receive arms that were captured in Lebanon, and (5) that Zaire will continue to lend its total support in all forms to Namibia’s SWAPO.

December 5, 1982. The New York Times cites an unnamed Israeli official as saying that Israel is willing “If we can” to help Zaire in efforts to obtain U.S. aid. “It is worthy,” he reportedly said, “of Western, especially American, help.”

January 6, 1983. In an op-ed essay in The New York Times on “Israel’s Global Ambitions,” Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi of the University of Haifa writes: “Consider any third-world area that has been a trouble spot in the past 10 years and you will discover Israeli officers and weapons implicated in the conflict—supporting American interests and helping in what they call ‘the defense of the West.’ . . . Throughout the third world, Israel has succeeded where other
Western powers have failed in using force to blunt the edge of native radicalism. And they do it with what Washington sees as aplomb, enthusiasm and grace. The Reagan Administration cannot send military advisers to Zaire, Guatemala, South Africa, or Haiti. Nor would many of America's European allies willingly aid repressive regimes like, say, the Chilean junta. What others regard as 'dirty work,' Israelis regard as defensible duty and even, in some cases, an exalted calling. There is virtually no Israeli opposition to this global adventurism . . . As far as the Israeli public is concerned, this is a non-issue."

January 17, 1983. Israeli Defense Minister Sharon arrives in Kinshasa at the head of a 90-member delegation.

January 18, 1983. Sharon visits Camp Tshatshi, general headquarters of Zaire's Special Presidential Brigade (BSP). AFP reports that Israeli advisers had "completely reorganized" the BSP during the previous year, and that "seven Israeli officers are still serving with BSP headquarters." AFP indicates that new Israeli military aid might be confined to restructuring the Kamanyola Division, since unnamed "sources" have said that Zaire has rejected "a recent Israeli offer to reorganize the entire Zairian army" because "Mobutu has no intention of relying on a single foreign source in defense matters." France, Belgium, and China "are all actively involved in training and equipping various Zairian army units and there was no question of the Kinshasa authorities ending this arrangement."

Israeli media provide some contradictory perspectives. Ma'ariv reports that "As a result of leaks and negative reactions from Zaire, Israel does not intend to offer Zaire weapons captured in the Lebanon war," while another Tel Aviv newspaper, Yedi'ot Aharonot, predicts that Sharon and Mobutu will sign a military agreement that "will apparently include the supplies of surplus Israel Defense Forces weapons and, among other things, weapons captured in Lebanon." A Jerusalem television correspondent describes President Mobutu as having said that "Israel will take the place of the Belgians in the aid to [the Kamanyola Division]" and that he intends to visit Israel soon "with the aid of God."

January 19, 1983. Mobutu announces a Zairian-Israeli five-year military cooperation plan. According to AFP, the plan aims at building a "real deterrent army" through the restructuring of the Kamanyola Division, and includes provision for the retraining of the division's 130-man artillery battalion; in addition, Israel "might also supervise reorganization of a second Zaire artillery battalion in Mbanza-Ngungu . . . and become involved in the armv's communications sector."

Sharon flies to Shaba to inspect the Kamanyola Division.

January 20, 1983. Sharon concludes his visit to Zaire. La Voix du Zaire confirms that "new military cooperation agreements" are signed by Sharon and Zaire's Secretary of State for National Defense and Territorial Security, Vice Admiral Lomponda wa Botende. The radio announcement says that, while "nothing has been said yet on these agreements, . . . one can affirm without fear of contradiction that these agreements concern specifically the reorganization of the Zairian armed forces and the Kamanyola Division, as well as training in the fields of artillery and construction."

Israel's IBA domestic radio service broadcasts a roundup report on the Sharon visit from a correspondent in Kinshasa:

"Zaire wants Israel to be its main arms supplier. A list submitted by President Mobutu to Defense Minister Sharon includes sea vessels, helicopters, tanks, cannons, and radar systems. Our correspondent has also learned from Zairian army sources that Mobutu has also requested security fences, assistance in control of the plains on the Angolan border, and Israeli-made miniature pilotless planes. The Zairian president and the defense minister will hold another meeting today."

Later in the day, IBA radio reports:

"The IDF delegation, which will now be expanded as a result of the agreement that has been signed, will deal with wide-scale activity in the field of organization, equipment, and training of the Zairian army. Zaire wants Israel to actually become its main prop and help build its armed forces. The heads of the Zairian defense establishment demand equipment for nearly all of their army's branches. The agreement signed today is the result of many months of negotiating, and concludes four days of heavily scheduled, intensive talks during which the Zairian secretary of defense and President Mobutu tried to convince Minister Sharon that their country needs a lot of . . . advanced equipment that would allow it to confront difficult security problems in a vast and sensitive area such as Shaba. Zaire is interested in procuring ships, radar systems, helicopters, cannons, advanced communication apparatuses, and security fences. It wants trucks, jeeps, light arms, and mortars, demanding that Israel help it rehabilitate and expand its air force. "President Mobutu and Minister Sharon agreed today on some of these subjects. Israel will reorganize the Kamanyola Division in the Shaba Province and will establish another force like the [Special Presidential Brigade], which is already being trained by Israeli officers. One of the main problems of the agreement is the question of financing. Israel will insist that the deals will be fully paid for, preferably in cash. Zaire is also interested in tanks and armored personnel carriers, President Mobutu said, and such equipment costs a lot."

"The significance of the agreement signed today is that Israel is becoming the number one prop for the Zairian army, with everything that this entails. The signing ceremony was public and was, incidentally, signed between Sharon and the Zairian defense secretary . . . ."

CSIS Africa Notes, March 21, 1983
count by its correspondent in Kinshasa:

"The agreement on defense cooperation, on a multinational basis, between Israel and Zaire was signed this morning in the Presidential Palace in Kinshasa. Upon signing the agreement, Israel has become Zaire's number one adviser on security affairs. The agreement reached today is based on a strategic survey composed by the defense minister's national security adviser, Major General Avraham Tamir. Israel will thus also provide counsel on the ways to strengthen and set up units trained by soldiers from other countries such as the People's Republic of China, Belgium, and France.

"According to the agreement, Israel will recruit, equip, and retrain the Kamanyola Division in Shaba Province in the southeastern part of Zaire. The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] delegation to Zaire will expand, and Israel will also supply Zaire with communications equipment, cannons, mortars, and possibly even patrol boats for the Zairian army. As part of the agreement, several battalions will also be set up. Some of the equipment the IDF will supply will be booty, some of it IDF surplus and in part material produced by the Israeli defense industries. Part of these arms will be given as a gift, and another part of it will be sold to Zaire.

"The signing ceremony was preceded by a two-and-a-half-hour conversation between President Mobutu and Minister Ariel Sharon. In the course of the meeting, the issue of the establishment of settlements in the style of the Nahal footholds was also mentioned, planned for Zaire's long southeastern border."

An AFP report from Kinshasa comments on Sharon's conversations with representatives of other African states: "Secret talks with government representatives from Tanzania, Kenya, Chad, and the Central African Republic were on the schedule of Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon's current visit to Zaire, reliable sources said here today. Mr. Sharon's aides refused to confirm or deny the reports, merely saying that in Israel's view Zaire is 'an open door to Africa.' But one Israeli source did not rule out other countries following Kinshasa's example and renewing diplomatic relations with Israel in 1983. However, the source firmly denied reports circulating here that Israel would be prepared to give military support through Zaire to the Chadian Government of Hissene Habré, who is facing a threat from a rival regime set up in northern Chad by Libya. It is understood here that the planned talks with envoys from other countries were the reason for General Sharon's arrival in Zaire last Monday being postponed for only 24 hours instead of 'indefinitely' as originally announced because of Israel's negotiations with Lebanon."

Ma'ariv quotes Zairian Vice Admiral Lomponda wa Botende as having said on the previous day that "Israel is the most suitable country to help Zaire defend its southeastern border with Angola, Zambia, and Tanzania. What is especially important for us is to defend the area of uranium, copper, and cobalt mines in Shaba near the border with Angola." Lomponda is said to have "confirmed that President Mobutu has decided to give preference to Israel over other countries for supplying aid for the reorganization of the Zairian army, since Israel has no economic interests in Zaire and it is a peace-loving country." Lomponda also reportedly told Ma'ariv that he would be paying an official visit to Israel in February instead of Mobutu, who would come at a later date.

AFP reports from Belgium that Nguza Karl-I-Bond, Brussels-based leader of the anti-Mobutu Congolese Front for the Restoration of Democracy (FCD), has issued a statement describing the Sharon visit as intended to strengthen and organize the "Tel Aviv-Kinshasa-Pretoria Axis" and "to ensure the personal protection of Mobutu, with arms recovered by the Israeli army in Lebanon."

January 21, 1983. Back in Israel, Minister of Defense Sharon says that he thinks that the military deal with Zaire will lead other African countries to turn to Israel for military aid. In a radio interview, he comments: "It is clear that a program such as this is secret... But clearly this program represents a large contribution to Israel's economy, a contribution to Israeli exports in arms and equipment." He says that Zaire will not be getting any of the arms captured by Israel during the war in Lebanon.

January 23, 1983. An AFP dispatch from Kinshasa reports the substance of a January 22 interview with President Mobutu:

"Zaire has decided to entrust Israel with the reorganization of 'all' the sectors of its national army which are yet to benefit from external assistance, Zairian head of state Field Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko stated on Saturday in Kinshasa in an interview with AFP. Israel will thus become—with France, Belgium, and China—the major partner of Zaire in the field of defense.

"Following agreements on military cooperation signed in January at the end of a four-day official visit to Zaire by Israeli Defense Minister General Ariel Sharon, Israel, according to... Mobutu, will essentially be entrusted with the 'restructuring' of the Kamanyola Division (12,000 men) based in Shaba in the southeast of the country, and will also take charge of reshaping several other units... Tel Aviv is to send military advisers to Kaleme, located on the bank of Lake Tanganyika, where the command of the Third Military Region of the Zairian naval force is headquartered.

"Israeli instructors will also be detached to Mbanza-Ngungu, southwest of Kinshasa, where the new artillery battalion of the Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ) is to be constituted. Furthermore... Israel will assist in particular in the fields of artillery and communications... The troop strength of the Special Presidential Brigade (BSP), the elite unit which has been trained since 1982 by about eight Israeli experts, will be considerably increased. It will go from the present 3,000 men to 7,500 and... the BSP will be transformed into a division in a few years.

"The number of Israeli officers who will be in...
Zaire within the framework of the implementation of the five-year plan for the modernization of the FAZ has not yet been determined . . . A Zairian delegation is supposed to go at any time now to Israel, [Mobutu] said, to define the terms and conditions of the effective implementation of the plan . . . Mobutu further revealed that the expenditure for the reequipping of several FAZ units will be borne 'by both Zaire and Israel: 50-50'. In this connection, President Mobutu has affirmed that the recent agreements concluded provided in black and white that under no circumstances would Tel Aviv supply Zaire with any arms seized from the PLO during the war in Lebanon.

"Mobutu . . . refused to confirm or deny possible contacts in Kinshasa between General Sharon and emissaries from neighboring countries, particularly Chad, the Central African Republic, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda: 'I cannot tell you who has seen Mr. Sharon. I do not know and I did not place any spies around the residence of the Israeli minister to find out'. . . . Asked about his possible role of intermediary to obtain military aid from Tel Aviv for Hissene Habré, in power in Chad, Mr. Mobutu replied that the Israeli leaders were 'big enough' to deal 'directly' with the Chadian leader if they so desired.

"Finally, Mr. Mobutu formally denied that he wished to act as Israel's advocate in Africa. 'We have dealt with that country in full sovereignty. Our relations with Israel are our business and we do not have to impose our views on our neighbors. It is up to those states and to Israel to normalize their relations directly.'"

In The Observer (London), Richard Hall comments on the agreement's implications for some of Zaire's neighbors:

- "The main thrust of Israel's military role will be in Shaba Province . . . Although Mobutu certainly needs to dissuade Katangese exiles in Angola from making further armed incursions, the Israeli-run force will create new tensions in the region. It will fuel the high level of insecurity which grips the left-wing government in Luanda, capital of neighboring Angola . . . The sole declared aim of the hundreds of Israeli experts who will be moving into Zaire is to step up internal security. But Angolans remember how Israel once gave covert support to the anti-government guerrillas of Holden Roberto—a brother-in-law of Mobutu—operating from Zaire . . ."

- "The close military liaison between Israel and South Africa is a secret, and ever since the Entebbe raid the prowess of the Israelis has been held in awe throughout the continent. Recent attacks on bridges in Angola have been attributed to Savimbi's guerrillas . . . they bear the hallmark of South African commando work, imitating Israeli techniques. Savimbi has openly declared himself 'Pretoria's ally' and his men are operating right up to the Zaire border where they are reputed to receive help from Mobutu.

- "Nguza Karl-I-Bond . . . claimed yesterday that a 'secret plan involving Zaire, Israel and South Africa' lies behind the Sharon visit [and] that he 'knows for sure from contacts in Kinshasa' of an agreement to equip the Zairian army with weapons captured in Lebanon from the Palestine Liberation Organization . . ."

- "The United States has always been intensely concerned with the importance of Zaire . . . But because of the dubious repute of Mobutu, it has kept a distance . . . Thus the Israelis can operate as a surrogate, rather in the way the Soviet Union deploys East Germany in countries within its ambit.

- "The most immediate impact of the Israelis will be the psychological one on Zaire's neighbors—especially Angola . . . The extra pressure of knowing the Israelis are next door could hasten a deal with Savimbi, then the removal of the Cubans. This, in turn, could lead to a settlement in Namibia—strictly on the terms the Americans and South Africans have long been seeking."

January 25, 1983. Moroccan King Hassan II's observations on the Israeli-Zairian rapprochement, excerpted from an interview broadcast from Paris:

"It was like a trick. Without mentioning the source from which I received these clarifications, I stress that it is a Zaire source and it is not from the opposition but from an official patriotic source, the name of which I will not divulge. One day I received this personality and I said to him that President Mobutu could have consulted me or his other friends. What happened? The answer was as follows: 'It is quite simply International Bank and IMF troubles. You know the Israeli lobby in the United States and its influence over banks. Israel told us that if we recognized it and resumed our relations with it, it would give important aid and thus help us ease the acuteness of our troubles.' I told that personality: 'If you had consulted me, I would have told you that Egypt in peacetime is far less rich than when it was at war with Israel. Egypt used to get $3 billion from the Arab states and after it signed the peace agreement with Israel, I personally, and quite frankly and truthfully, believed it would get double that. In fact, it receives only half that figure. If you had consulted me, I would have told you about this; and now, did you get anything from the Israelis?' He answered in the negative. I also asked him: 'Have your troubles ended?' Again he answered in the negative. Then I told him: 'You should take the necessary measure so that this state of affairs will not last any longer.'"

February 17, 1983. Vice Admiral Lomponda wa Botende returns to Zaire from a six-day official visit to Israel.

February 22, 1983. The Belgian newspaper Le Soir publishes an interview with President Mobutu which includes the following exchanges:

Le Soir: Why didn't Zaire entrust the reorganization of the Kamanyola Division . . . to Belgian military assistance?
Mobutu: I should ask you that question. Whom did Mobutu first ask to take care of the reorganization of the Kamanyola Division? Belgium. The answer [was] that it would be difficult for parliament to agree to increase the number of the 110 military technicians. There was also the problem of money. I could not let the question of the reorganization of this elite unit drag on. This is why we asked the Israelis and they agreed right away. Compare Israel's immediate "yes" with your country's hesitation. I can do nothing about it.

Le Soir: You say Belgium said it would be expensive, but it is likely to be expensive for the Israelis too.

Mobutu: Why not? We did not ask Belgium, France, or China to give us a present; we asked them to provide their military skill to train commandos and paratroopers. We know that it is expensive. In fact, all those who come as military technicians are given cars and are housed. They have to be paid, but the security of our country is so vital that we did not hesitate over the expenses.

Le Soir: Aren't you afraid that with the departure of Defense Minister General Sharon (with whom you maintained excellent personal relations) the agreements with Israel might be questioned?

Mobutu: We are dealing with the government of Israel, and relations between individuals, be they head of state or minister of defense, do not change anything. If you tell me that Sharon is leaving and the Israeli government can challenge everything, then Zaire too can question everything.

Le Soir: Aren't you afraid of negative reactions from the Arab countries?

Mobutu: I believe Zaire has exercised its sovereignty in what it has done. The Arab countries to which you refer had cut off their aid to Zaire. We cannot allow this type of aid to be linked to the problem of sovereignty of a state like Zaire. I am adamant on this point.

Le Soir: According to certain reports, thanks to Zaire's support, a third front has been set up in Angola with the FNLA against Luanda. If this is nonsense, what are the intentions of those who spread these reports?

Mobutu: It is more than nonsense; it is stupidity. Every year, almost always about this time, a Portuguese communist newspaper puts out such news. We are calm; our Angolan brothers know it is not true ... This is the fourth time such news has been spread. I say it is nonsense.

March 7, 1983. In their syndicated column appearing in The Washington Post and other U.S. newspapers, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak discuss the impact of "Israel's Zaire Connection" on the U.S. foreign policymaking process. Some excerpts:

- "Israel is using its unmatched influence on Capitol Hill to persuade critics of Zaire's President Mobutu to vote the full $20 million in military aid asked by President Reagan, a unique thrust into U.S. politics designed to further Israel's diplomatic offensive in Africa, but potentially unsettling to U.S. security interests."
- "The thrust may rescue Zaire's aid package, deeply endangered by years of accumulated congressional resentment toward corruption in [that country]. Intelligence specialists who deal with Africa told us an Israeli cleanup of Mobutu's tarnished reputation in Congress was the price offered in return for Zaire's diplomatic recognition of Israel last May."
- "Ramifications of Israel's Zaire connection are beginning to be felt in congressional committees handling the aid package—such as the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, headed by Rep. Clarence Long of Maryland. Long told us his subcommittee has received a specific request from Israel—but 'not directly'—to give Mobutu the full military aid . . ."
- "If successful with its Zaire account, Israel is likely to broker aid favors for other pariahs on the congressional hit list to enhance its influence. Israel has been quietly pressing administration officials—particularly in the Pentagon and CIA—to relax present U.S. strictures against Ethiopia, Iran and the Central African Republic. . . ."

[Note: The Evans and Novak reference to Israeli interest in Ethiopia complements an item in the January 20 issue of The Economist's intelligence weekly Foreign Report entitled "Israel's Ethiopian Comeback." The highlights: "In a remarkable turnabout, Israelis are quietly replacing some of the Russians and East Germans at the heart of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in Ethiopia. Unlike most western nations, which cut back their presence and aid to near-zero after Mengistu seized power, the Israelis did their best to hold on to their close ties with the intelligence service and some ministries. That persistence is apparently paying off . . . Mengistu's first move was to restore the Israelis as technical advisers to the intelligence service, and oust the East Germans . . . Israelis have also become advisers to the top executive body in Ethiopia, the Dergue, and to Mengistu's bodyguard. Several Ethiopian delegations have visited Israel and a decision may be made soon to open up air travel between Tel Aviv and Addis Ababa. The Israelis have promised Ethiopia that if the Soviet Union suspends its military aid, they will replace it. Israel has a factory capable of renovating Soviet T-55 tanks, which are widely used by the Ethiopians, and has a large supply of Soviet weapons captured from the Palestine Liberation Organization. . . ."]

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