

Israeli Involvement in Electronic Surveillance in Angola: A Step Towards Transparency or the Sophistication of Illegal Practices?



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November 2021



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**This report was commissioned by the Media Policy and Democracy Project (MPDP).
Supported by a grant from Luminate**

The MPDP is a joint project of the University of Johannesburg's
Department of Communication and Media and the University of South Africa's
Department of Communication Science.

November 2021

Available from the Media Policy and Democracy Project website:

<https://www.mediaanddemocracy.com/>

Abstract

Several interactions between retired Israeli intelligence officials and the Angolan power elite and armed forces cadres have occurred since the 1990s. The purchase of sophisticated surveillance materials and the intervention of Israeli businesspeople and private companies for the purposes of intelligence collection or security operations have been a mark of these collaborations. Over the past two decades, there has been a deepening of Israeli collaboration with Angola's intelligence services and elites. This work aims to identify the main Israeli operators in electronic security and surveillance in Angola and briefly explain the history of their involvement. It considers whether their intervention in the country has helped to bring surveillance operations more in line with the law and good practice or if, instead, their approach has been politically neutral and related to business objectives (i.e. profit), thus in practice offering a more sophisticated but not necessarily legal way to enable the use in Angola of the most advanced information technologies. Finally, it seeks to understand the reasons for the Israeli interference in Angola.

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Introduction

Several interactions between retired Israeli intelligence officials and the Angolan power elite have occurred since the 1990s. This work aims to identify the main Israeli operators in electronic security and surveillance in Angola and briefly explain the history of their involvement, as well as the aims and results of such cooperation.

The first relevant involvement, which has been perceived so far, of a well-known Israeli in intelligence and surveillance activities in Angola was that of Arkady Gaydamak in the 1990s. According to his statements made years later in a London-based trial, he was responsible for the establishment of an intelligence and surveillance system in the Angolan diamond zones during the civil war, which made it possible to defeat the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) (Verde, 2021), the strong force that opposed the government of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Both parties fought a long and destructive civil war from 1975 to 2002. Years later, several interactions between Israeli and Angolan intelligence services and Angola's elites occurred at an official level – Israel became a place of training for future Angolan intelligence agents – and through the hiring by Angola of retired Israeli intelligence officers, the purchase of sophisticated surveillance materials and the intervention of businessmen and private companies for the purpose of intelligence collection began. Over the past few years, there has been a deepening of Israeli collaboration with Angola's intelligence services and elites. Much of the material that Angola has acquired from Israel came from large sales of equipment considered “surplus” by the Israeli Ministry of Defence (Africa Monitor, 2020).

This work seeks to identify the main Israeli operators in electronic security and surveillance in Angola and considers whether their intervention has helped to bring surveillance operations more in line with the rule of law and good practice, or if it has been politically neutral, meaning that it does not have any ideological or political aims beyond profit objectives, thereby offering a more sophisticated but not necessarily legal approach to enabling the use in Angola of the most advanced information technologies. The hypothesis formulated here admits that the assistance of a country that portrays itself as democratic (Israel) to an authoritarian regime (Angola), could perhaps contribute to an improvement in the situation in the country governed by that regime or, at least, assist in a transition to democracy or greater transparency. This is not the place to discuss Israel's qualification as a democracy and the debate that arises on the subject. It is enough to note that this is how Israel defines itself in its basic laws, and that it has carried out regular and non-contentious elections to elect its political organs since its foundation in 1948.

Another thing that needs to be dealt with is why Israel has such a great interest in Angola and what specifically its concerns are. There is also the specific apprehension that Israel has practically no control over former intelligence officers commercialising their skills in the open market, which leads to a revolving door between the state and private sector and Israel acting as an incubator of many spytech start-ups.

The research focuses on private Israeli collaboration (people or corporations) with Angola, without delving into state-to-state cooperation, even though in some areas it will be difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Kick Off: The Role of Arkady Gaydamak

It cannot be said that Arkady Gaydamak was the first Israeli to collaborate with the Angolan secret services and the local power elite, but he was certainly the one who first rose to prominence. Apparently, he was a key man in the Angolan intelligence and power structure during the 1990s. The role played by Gaydamak remains unclear; he made the only known facts public in a judicial case in a London court in 2012.¹ During this case, which opposed Gaydamak to another Israeli compatriot, Lev Leviev, known as the “King of Diamonds” (Forbes, 2019), regarding diamond business income in Angola, some light was shed on his activities. The case focused on their role and the benefits they received in the establishment of companies as Ascorp, a trading diamond company created in Angola in partnership with the former wife of the then-president of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, and their daughter, Isabel dos Santos. These companies appeared not to comply with Angolan law, which had established a state monopoly on the marketing of diamonds. However, the essence of the dispute between the two tycoons was the receiving of commissions. Interestingly, London ends up, consistently, to be the preferred legal forum chosen by millionaire parties due to the reputation of independence and judicial expertise of its judges, and in this case since Leviev lived in London.

In his testimony, Gaydamak explained that he was asked by the Angolan president to structure a security system in Angola’s diamond area to cut the income stream to UNITA, to strangle it of resources. It should be noted that UNITA, the government’s enemy in the long and protracted civil war that devastated Angola (Pearce, 2015), was financed by revenues from the diamond trade, originating the infamous concept of “blood diamonds” (Sherman, 2000). The diamond trade was central to the survival of the government and the winning of the war. It

was in this context that Gaydamak explained that he had created a mechanism to stop the war “by cutting the financing to the rebels that finance their arm buying through the illegal diamond trading” (Gaydamak testimony, 2012). This mechanism was based on the incorporation of a company – Ascorp – that would control all exports, and on the sophisticated development of an intelligence and security system in the area. Gaydamak claimed that he was responsible for the creation of a mixed system of intelligence and control of the diamond trade that led to the defeat of UNITA. In addition to these public revelations, Gaydamak’s narrative, beyond directly involving the former president, his ex-wife and his daughter, frequently referred to the intervention of General Vieira Dias (known as “Kopelipa”) as a usual intermediary in these negotiations. This general would come to play a powerful role as chief minister of the president’s Security House (with a broad role in the Angolan government) and would be one of the main future interlocutors of the Israelis, as we shall see.

Marques (2012) mentions that among Gaydamak’s contractors for the provision of services in Angola were senior figures from the Israeli external intelligence services (Mossad) and a retired general from the Israeli army. He writes that, on 1 August 1998, Gaydamak created SCG Israel Limited (SCG) with two partners: a former director of Mossad, Danny Yatom, and a former chief of the General Staff of Israel’s Defence Forces, General Mosh Levy. A little over a month later, on 19 September 1998, SCG signed a memorandum with the Republic of Angola for the “creation of a unit for the protection of institutions, protocol and intervention individuals”. In his court testimony mentioned earlier, Gaydamak explained that the deal was a necessary cover for SCG arms shipments to Angola to protect the diamond industry. At the end of his adjudication, the British judge highlighted Yatom’s role as a former director of

¹ EWC 1740 (Ch)(2012, June 29).

Mossad and that of Brigadier Avinoam Dagan, a manager of the project, as another major operative of the Israeli spy agency. It was established in court that Gaydamak and his agents provided military intelligence services to the Angolan government (Marques, 2012). Additionally, Colonel Rali Ramot, a former Israeli paratrooper commando, was another operative appointed by Gaydamak to direct K&P, a company created by him to provide security services to Ascorp. Later, Ramot became the head of security for Endiama, Angola's public diamond company. The private security company (K&P) is also a partnership with security chiefs from Angolans. K&P's main Angolan partners were Chief Commissioner Eugénio Pedro Alexandre, then National Director of Criminal Investigation; Commissioner Elias Dumbo Livulo, provincial commander of the National Police in Huambo; Commissioner José Alfredo (Ekuikui), former general commander of the National Police; and Commissioner Alfredo Eduardo Manuel Mingas (Panda), former commander of the Rapid Intervention Police (Marques, 2012). These are not just elites but serving members of the security establishment, which shows the depth of the practices that mix the State and private interests in Angola. Former senior members of Israel's security apparatus worked in Angola as government operatives to assist with some of the thorniest tasks.

Naturally, part of the operations mounted by the Israelis in partnership with the Angolan elites involved the use of sophisticated electronic surveillance mechanisms. Gaydamak was not expected to master the details, but rather to bring in the equipment and experts in that area. In the scandal dubbed Angolagate, the famous case concerning illegal arms sales and corruption that was investigated and adjudicated in France, as several many contracts relating to the supply of armaments passed through this European country or were brokered by French ministers or relevant persons, as the son of President Mitterrand, it was mentioned that three parallel French investigations

had been undertaken into Gaydamak's business operations (Sulitzer, 2018). One of them was into the unlicensed sale by France, mediated by Gaydamak, of telecommunications surveillance equipment to Angola. The equipment enabled Luanda's intelligence agency to listen to GSM cell phones and track down the coordinates of satellite telephones. Apparently, on the only occasion that the MPLA (Angolan People's Liberation Movement) was close to eliminating UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi before 2001, it had used the coordinates from his satellite phone as guidance for a MiG bomber (Africa Confidential, 2001).

Gaydamak, as far as this research is aware of, did not hold an official position in Israel, unlike many of the Israelis he contracted or who later provided services in Angola. There is some controversy about his belonging to the intelligence services or his real relationship with them. Gaydamak was born in 1952 in Moscow in the former Soviet Union. In his twenties, he emigrated to Israel where he acquired citizenship. After then moving to France, he distinguished himself in several local business endeavours. In Israel, he linked himself to sports teams and ran for mayor of Jerusalem, but failed. Journalist James Last wrote: "Although he made money from the French operation, his real fortune came during the Soviet Perestroika era when Gaydamak allegedly facilitated arms deals between Russia, Czechoslovakia and most prominently, Angola" (Last, 2005, para. 2). Curiously, his name appears in different places in relation to intelligence services. Charles Pasqua, a former French interior minister, mentioned that Gaydamak was once a member of the French secret services, DST (Messman, 2009). Barack and Sheffer (2013) argued that his links to Mossad were clear, and that he most probably had some connection with the Israeli secret service. Recently, a journalist qualified him as a former "triple agent" from DST, Mossad and the KGB (Etchegoin, 2018).

Building on Israeli Security Expertise: Haim Taib

The truth is that Gaydamak's activities took root and opened the door to opportunities for various Israeli businesspeople and the panoply of former soldiers and members of the secret service who accompanied them. The Israeli businessman Haim Taib is one of the people often referred to regarding more recent Israeli activities in Angola (Africa Monitor, 2020). According to his official biography, Taib was born in Jerusalem in 1960 and grew up in a *moshav*. After military service in the Israeli Defence Force, Taib dedicated himself to work in an agro-industrial company. During the 1990s, he went to Portugal and then to Angola, where he established the Menomadin Group, which describes itself rather broadly as a group focused on creating organisations, companies and philanthropies that help transform people's lives (Menomadin Group n.d.). Nowadays, Taib is the founder and president of the Menomadin Group and the Menomadin Foundation and the founder of the Mitrelli Group. The latter group was created in the early 2000s, and its main activity is to provide Israeli security equipment to the Angolan intelligence services (Anonymous, 2020). His legal base appears to be in the Principality of Liechtenstein (Menomadin Group, n.d.), and in Angola, his influence is enormous.

Sources say that Taib became the main supplier of Israeli military and security equipment to Angola in about 2012 (Angola Monitor, 2020; Anonymous, 2021). It is alleged that the equipment imported under the aegis of Taib included new electronic systems for a communications centre, Batope, affiliated with the SIM Military Intelligence Service (SIM) based in Catumbela with a hub in Luanda, which has the capacity to intercept communications from the region (Africa Monitor, 2020; Anonymous, 2021), providing the Angolan services with the capacity to proceed with untargeted signals intelligence surveillance. At that time, the SIM was led by General Zé Maria, one of

President dos Santos' most trusted advisers. After General Miala's removal from the other intelligence services in 2006, General Zé Maria's structure was the most powerful in the country, and it was here that the entire grand strategy for maintaining power was conceived, such as the famous 15+2 case.

In June 2015 Angolan police detained 15 human rights defenders while they attended a meeting. They were reading Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and discussing peaceful methods of protest. Two days later, two more activists were arrested. Authorities also formally indicted two women, Laurinda Gouveia and Rosa Conde, but did not detain them. The group of human rights defenders became known as Angola 15+2. Among the human rights defenders detained were Domingos da Cruz, Afonso Mayenda (also known as Mbanza Hamza), Luaty Beirão, Manuel Nito Alves and Albano Bingo. On March 28, 2016, the Luanda Provincial Court sentenced the human rights defenders in the 15+2 case to prison terms ranging from two years and three months to eight years and six months for the alleged crimes of preparatory acts of rebellion and criminal association. But public outcry led to the Supreme Court in Luanda ordering their release. It turned out to be a fiasco for the regime of José Eduardo dos Santos. (Verde, 2021).

Beyond the influence and arrangements with General Zé Maria, the most prominent partner in Angola was General Kopelipa, head of the Security House of the president. In the past, General Kopelipa was the coordinator of the Office for the National Reconstruction, an activity in which Taib was influential, as he was a big contributor to the reconstruction of civil infrastructure in Angola and initiated ambitious ventures to support the nation's recovery (Menomadin Group, n.d.). Africa Monitor, an exclusive intelligence service for subscribers with an extensive database on Portuguese-speaking African countries, notes that the material that

Angola acquired from Israel through Taib came from equipment considered “surplus” by the Israeli Ministry of Defence (2020). It also confirms that, on the Israeli side, two autonomous entities took part in the transactions, Israeli Military Industries (IMI) and Israeli Aerospace Industries (IAI), depending on the specific nature of the orders. Materials, security and intelligence were all ordered by General Kopelipa, with the participation of several intermediaries (Africa Monitor, 2020). For the Israelis, the coordinator of the activities was Taib, but as happened with Gaydamak, he was surrounded by several former Israeli officials, including Colonel Eytan Stibbe.

Several sources confirm that the preponderance of Israel as a supplier to Angola was based on the joint work of Taib and Stibbe, who gave their country an advanced role in the field of training Angolan police officers and experts in “intelligence” for their services of information, State Security and Intelligence Service (SINSE) and External Intelligence Service (SIE); the training took place in Israel or Angola, provided by staff from the Israeli Police (the Training Institute) and Mossad. SINSE individuals, trained in Israel, have been placed as provincial directors or as analysts or research experts (Africa Monitor, 2000; Anonymous, 2021). The training provided by Israel is quite comprehensive and ranges from Krav Maga techniques of physical fighting to the sophistication of surveillance and electronic interception, as well as elements of cybernetic “war”. (Anonymous, 2021).

As mentioned in another report (Verde, 2021b), Taib was instrumental in establishing the electronic surveillance system targeting Rafael Marques, the investigative journalist. This endeavour was supposedly contracted by General Zé Maria, Vice President Manuel Vicente and General Kopelipa.

Most recently, Taib’s name appeared in a confusing story about the hacking of Sonangol, the powerful national oil company. According to research done by Marques (2019), during the 2019 summer, the oil company was subjected to a cyberattack intended to destroy its database. In the end, the attack only reached the network and eliminated all the information contained in it, namely shared folders, data, documents and applications. Although the attack was not completely successful, it was sufficiently ominous to raise concerns within the corporation. Internal experts admitted that a virus was implemented within the company and anonymously explained that the code of Sonangol’s server was integrated into the coding of the virus. Due to the complexity of the virus, it could only have been introduced by foreigners (Marques, 2019, Anonymous, 2021). Local experts affirmed that only foreign companies provide consultancy and auditing services to Sonangol or have overall access to the information systems and technologies of the company. The same sources, while not making public comments or providing evidence, stated that there had been external pressure to buy the Israeli Sentinel One antivirus system, which is not at the top of the world’s antivirus list and is not used by large international companies. The same sources argued that part of this pressure came from Taib, although in the end, an Israeli antivirus system was used to combat the attack.

This story is far from clear. The only thing that several testimonies mention is the intervention of Taib as a purported expert in electronic surveillance from the dos Santos epoch. Some point to him as the saviour of Sonangol’s IT systems, while others put him as the mind behind the attack (Anonymous, 2021). While there is currently no evidence, some Israeli involvement in the matter seems likely.

Discernible Patterns in Israeli Behaviour in Angola

From the examples of Gaydamak and Taib, a pattern of behaviour and action on the part of Israelis in Angola seems to emerge. There is a front man who has no formal links with the Israeli state, whether it be the intelligence services or the armed forces. This person is a global businessman, not exclusively based in Israel, and has established relations with the Angolan political power elite. Once it has been agreed what the Angolans want or need, the front man hires a series of retired secret officers and agents who will be the operatives for all activities. As far as we can see, none of them has an official function; they are all retired, although sometimes they still occupy advisory or reservist posts, embarking in a strange kind of revolving door between private and public. The activities that the Israelis specialise in supplying to Angola are linked to surveillance and interception material, special training of agents and troops, and specific military material.

One of Gaydamak's main collaborators, as mentioned above, was a director of Mossad, Danny Yatom. He was the eighth director, from 1996 to 1998, when, following two operational mishaps, he resigned. From 1999, he served as Prime Minister Ehud Barak's security adviser and political chief of staff. Later, he was chairman of Koor Metals' board of directors. Between 2003 and 2007, he was elected to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) representing the Labor Party. He resigned from the Knesset in 2008 and became a businessman (JVL, 2021). During his tenure as Mossad chief, Yatom tried to enhance the position of the intelligence service in Africa to curb possible Arab influence, and the most prominent successes were in the Congo and in South Africa where he was able to establish good working relationships with local partners (AIA, 2008). After leaving the service, Yatom founded a security consulting company. His main partner was Avi Dagan, former deputy director of the Caesarea special operations unit of Mossad and, from 1993 to

1996, the head of Mossad's Tzomet branch, which ran agents. This company is the SCG, mentioned above as Gaydamak's brainchild.

In 1999, Arie Amit, former officer of military intelligence and ex-commander of the Jerusalem District Police, was appointed SCG's director general (AIA, 2008). It was in this capacity that Yatom entered Angola's intelligence business with Gaydamak, who he had a good impression of (AIA, 2008). As seen above, Marques (2012) affirms that SCG, in which apparently Yatom and Dagon had a stake, was formed specifically by Gaydamak to operate in Angola and worked as a special unit for the advancement of dos Santos' war and political aims. The chronology makes it apparent that Yatom, immediately after leaving Mossad – albeit exercising functions at the level of the government of Ehud Barak – was already intervening in Angola to support José Eduardo dos Santos in the interruption of UNITA's diamond supplies. Rosa Mendes, a Portuguese journalist, claims that at that time (the late 1990s) an Israeli daily reported that Yatom visited Luanda for meetings at the highest level, organised by Gaydamak (Mendes, 2000). Mendes explains that after the intervention of Gaydamak and Yatom, Angola cleared all contracts and concessions for the sale of diamonds. The biggest blow was to De Beers. Luanda justified its actions by highlighting the need for transparency. At the time, Mendes told his readers that the winner was an Israeli businessman acting in the arms purchase and diamond trade: Gaydamak.

Events become clear by reading the accounts of the time, the court case transcripts and listening to participants at the security operations against UNITA. In the civil war with UNITA, the government of José Eduardo dos Santos mounted a large security operation brokered by Gaydamak and possibly concocted by Yatom. This operation involved cutting UNITA's diamond funds, purchasing weapons and using intelligence to

encircle Savimbi and members of his movement. As is known, the operation was a success for the government with the siege and death of Savimbi in 2002.

Regarding Taib's endeavours in Angola, Colonel Stibbe appears to occupy a prominent role. Stibbe was an Israeli Air Force officer, born in 1958, who received the Israeli Air Force's (IAF) Outstanding Reservist Award and its Distinguished Service Medal. "Eytan Stibbe was a remarkable fighter pilot. He entered the air force in 1976 and flew Skyhawk, Phantom and F-16 jets. During the First Lebanon War, he distinguished himself as the only F-16 pilot in the history of the Israeli air force who shot down four enemy planes in a single sortie" (Weinglass, 2021, para. 25). He was also Israel's first man in space and a private astronaut (Ovadia, 2021). He spent more than 43 years in the Air Force, first as a professional and then as an active reservist. When he left military service in 1984, Stibbe immediately dedicated himself to business projects involving the operation of cellular and satellite communications systems. He also founded Vital Capital Fund, a company that called itself a leading impact investment private equity fund focused on sub-Saharan Africa (Vital

Capital, 2020). In 2012, he acquired 35% of Mitrelli, finding himself in partnership with Taib. In 2018, Stibbe left Mitrelli and sold all his shares in the company. His official biography states that he has been involved in investments in Africa for the past 26 years and has worked extensively in initiating business and financing ventures worldwide, primarily in developing countries, including many countries in Africa (EMPEA, 2021). There is no doubt that Taib and Stibbe were partners, and that one of their areas of expertise was cellular and communications systems. Sources mention that Stibbe was omnipresent during dos Santos' time but has now left Luanda and invests in the Ivory Coast and Ghana through Vital Capital (Africa Intelligence, 2019). Israeli journalists affirm that the companies owned or participated in by Stibbe have been involved in defence exports to Angola and spent several years massively arming the Angolan government, training its troops, building airports and security systems, and being involved in the purchase of a plane for dos Santos (Weinglass, 2021). Stibbe denies any wrongdoing and emphasises that he has always followed the law and acted in the best interests of peacekeeping (Weinglass, 2021).

Outside the Box: Isabel dos Santos and Black Cube

On 29 March 2021, the usually circumspect *Financial Times* ran an article about Isabel dos Santos, the billionaire daughter of former President dos Santos. It read: "Africa's richest woman says she was targeted in 'personal vendetta'", and a sub-title added, "Isabel dos Santos cites secret recordings in court filing as she says Angolan president targeted her" (Cotterill & Croft, 2021). The interesting aspect of this news piece was the confirmation by Isabel dos Santos that she had secret recordings to prove her allegations. Her accusations were directed against the current Angolan president, João Lourenço, who has defined his presidential

mandate as a struggle against corruption (Verde, 2021). Isabel dos Santos charged her father's successor with having engineered a conspiracy to illegally usurp her assets, and she claimed to be able to prove that the Luanda Leaks were a targeted attack to destroy her business. This was an international investigation into Isabel dos Santos resulting from an information leak of more than 715 000 documents analysed by 120 reporters from the largest media companies around the world. It revealed how she had transferred at least US\$115 million from Sonangol's coffers to a company in Dubai controlled by people close to her. According

to the *Financial Times* (Cotterill & Croft, 2021), she made these allegations in a response presented to the High Court in London in the context of a process in which Unitel (an Angolan telecom corporation) requested the return of loans made to Isabel dos Santos. Her court documents purport that Lourenço, motivated by personal revenge, ordered Angolan prosecutors, judges and spies to launch a series of coordinated attacks against her using the resources of the Angolan state, including the country's judicial system and secret services. Isabel dos Santos mentions that the Angolan government instructed the judicial system (including the Angolan Supreme Court and the attorney general) to institute a pre-determined judicial process against her, which allowed for the application of an order to freeze her assets. She based her strong affirmations on the admission of having secret recordings that proved that the president of Angola mounted this operation (Cotterill & Croft, 2021). The secret recordings were, she explained, captured by the private intelligence agency Black Cube, founded by former members of Mossad. She added that the Israeli company was chosen for its experience in uncovering conspiracies. She highlighted that she had many hours of audio and video recordings that allegedly show former senior officials and advisers of the Angolan government making reprehensible revelations about how they conspired to launch a series of coordinated attacks against her.

Black Cube defines itself as consisting of a select group of veterans from Israeli elite intelligence units specialising in tailored solutions

for complex business and litigation challenges (Black Cube, 2010). Its cadres include the late Meir Dagan, considered one of the most illustrious and successful directors of Mossad (2002–2012), a post to which he was appointed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon; Efraim Halevy, ninth head of Mossad, and Yohanan Danino, who served as the Israeli Police Commissioner and is renowned for establishing its flagship unit Lahav 433 (Black Cube, 2010). The corporation was created in 2010, is a registered trademark in Israel, the UK and the USA and is owned by Dan Zorella and his partner, Avi Yanus, both former Israeli intelligence officers (Peretz, 2014).

This story is extraordinary because it is one in which what seems unbelievable has become public, as happened in Gaydamak's London trial. Isabel dos Santos, daughter of a former president of the Republic of Angola, contracts with a company belonging to former members of Israeli intelligence to investigate the current president of Angola and people close to him, with a view to denouncing a conspiracy against her. For this investigation, the Israeli company will have resorted to sophisticated electronic surveillance operations that may be allowed under the laws of some countries but are prohibited in others. This is not clear in the information provided to the public. What is clear is that the Angolan elite trust the Israelis for their most advanced electronic surveillance operations, and the Israelis actively collaborate with them. Strangely enough, though, there was no prosecution concerning this.

Israel's Cooperation: Business and Much More

It becomes clear from the facts presented that there has been a profound collaboration between the Angolan political elite and former members of the Israeli intelligence services and armed forces in fundamental security and electronic surveillance operations. The role played by the Israelis in the strategy to defeat UNITA in the civil war has been verified, as has the continuation of their services during the long term of President dos Santos and their use in the heated confrontation between Isabel dos Santos and the current president, Lourenço. The Israeli role in these varied operations is undeniable.

It is not initially clear why either country would have anything to do with the other, and it is interesting to try to understand how the Israelis established such strong links with Angola. Sources (Anonymous, 2021) point to the role of Fernando Dias dos Santos, now the speaker of Parliament but for many years a strong man of Angolan security. He was vice minister for security in 1987, general commander of the national police from 1995 to 2002 and interior minister in 2002. After that, he began a political career as prime minister and then as vice president of the Republic. It is said that Dias dos Santos was an admirer of the standards of efficiency with which Israel's information services and security system operated (Africa Monitor, 2020). Old rumours indicate that, as interior minister, he attended a course incognito at Mossad – his absence from Luanda was attributed to illness (Africa Monitor, 2020). The same sources also linked Generals Kopelipa and Zé Maria to Israel (Africa Monitor, 2020). Apparently, this triangle of powerful Angolan leaders constituted the basic circle that worked with Israel (Anonymous, 2021).

The fundamental aim of this work, in addition to establishing the strong ties between Israel and Angola at the level of intelligence and electronic surveillance, is to understand why a nation that proclaims itself to be democratic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018) allows its retired senior

officials to provide services and transfer technology that supports the practices of an authoritarian regime, including the oppression and suppression of dissent. Does this support, in the end, contribute to a transition to democracy or at least to more transparency? Israel defines itself as a “parliamentary democracy. Israeli citizens vote for their party of choice in national elections, bestowing sovereignty on the Knesset, the Israeli parliament” (MFA, 2018, p. 7). It has an independent and proactive judiciary that “applies and interprets developing authoritative case law and [renders] decisions of a constitutional nature” (MFA, 2018, p. 13). “Equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms are the cornerstones of Israel's democracy, both in law and in practice” (MFA, 2018, p. 15). According to the Global Democracy Index 2020 (*The Economist*, 2021), Israel is a “flawed democracy”. Dowty gives the same verdict (2018). In addition, Angola is known as an authoritarian country (*The Economist*, 2021).

The hypothesis we worked with is that the assistance of a country that portrays itself as democratic to a country with an authoritarian regime could contribute to a transition to democracy, or at a minimum, to increased transparency; however, our analysis has not confirmed this hypothesis. In fact, the most relevant people and companies that were analysed – Gaydamak, Taib and Black Cube – do not appear to have supported the development in Angola of any process of engagement with or support for a democratic transition, respect for the rule of law or transparency of procedures. Their role was one of technical efficiency, aiming to make a profit. No contribution was foreseen beyond the effective development of the needs of the Angolan elite. It is not known whether there was a code of conduct for their operations or if they complied with the rule of law, given that Angolan law in the past has been quite permissive on these matters.

Politically, it does not appear that the proximity between the Israeli entities and the Angolan government has brought about an alignment

between the respective states. An example of this was the displeasure shown in 2016 by the Israeli ambassador to Angola, Oren Rozenblat, who conveyed his government's disappointment and indignation regarding Luanda's support for a United Nations (UN) resolution condemning the construction of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. At the time, Rozenblat reiterated his country's decision to "temporarily limit" official contact with countries that supported the UN Security Council's decision, including Angola (VOA, 2016). In 2018, the Angolan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manuel Augusto, dismissed the director for Africa, Middle East and Regional Organisations, Joaquim do Espírito Santo, and an adviser to the Angolan Embassy in Tel Aviv, João Diogo Fortunato, for failure to follow the procedures of the internal decision-making chain, which harmed the good name and image of Angola with countries with which it maintained a historic relationship. At issue was the participation of Fortunato in the inauguration of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, with the consent of Espírito Santo (Nascimento, 2018). Following this, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) congratulated the Angolan government for the dismissal of these diplomats, believing that Angola would never insult the Palestinians by recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital or by participating in any related event. This position was expressed in an opinion article written by the secretary general of the PLO, Saeb Erekat, and published in *Jornal de Angola*, the first time he had published in a newspaper in a non-Arab African country. In the article, entitled "Thank you very much, Angola", he wrote, "Angola, a country with which Palestinians share a common history of fighting colonialism, was part of a celebration of the US Government's support for Israeli attacks and colonial actions in occupied Palestine" (Erekat, 2018, para. 1). Adding "From the beginning we understood that something had gone wrong and the dismissal of two Angolan diplomats responsible for the Angolan participation in that shameful event, as announced by Minister Manuel Augusto, ended up

confirming what we all knew: Angola has a strong solidarity with Palestine and the certainty that surely Angola will never be part of an insult against the Palestinian people" (Erekat, 2018, para.5).

Our analysis leads us to the following conclusions:

It is evident that there has been deep collaboration in the area of security and electronic surveillance between Angola and Israeli millionaires and senior retired cadres. It can be stated that this is an old and intense relationship dating back to at least the 1990s. This relationship helped the Angolan government win the civil war and, subsequently, consolidate its power and neutralise its enemies. As far as it is possible to obtain any insight, this relationship has been mostly business-related, bringing large profits to the Israeli entities involved, possibly forming the basis of the wealth of certain Israeli companies and multimillionaires. There is no clear sign that these individuals and companies have shown sensitivity to the rule of law in Angola or provided any assistance to a democratic transition.

From the point of view of Israel, there is no evidence that the relationship between its former cadres and Angola has created any alignment of Angolan foreign policy with Israeli foreign policy. However, this does not mean that the Israeli intervention in Angola is purely commercial, although it may appear that way upon a perfunctory inspection. As Gidron (2020) notes, Israel's geostrategic interest in Africa since its beginning had a clear objective, which was to limit the Arab presence on that continent, proceeding with a kind of containment policy by occupying spaces where this influence was not felt and blocking it where it already had a toehold. This policy has persisted since the 1960s. In Angola, there is no special Islamic influence, but as the country has formerly aligned with the Soviet bloc and with the claims of Palestine, Israel's objective seems to be to occupy the space and limit Angola's support for Palestine or at least make it no more than rhetoric.

In addition to this broad strategic interest on the part of Israel, Angola has been a partner of Israel and of many Israelis in the diamond trade, and a regular

partner in trade exchanges. Lev Leviev is a perfect example of Israel's immersion in the diamond business in Angola. Leviev is an Israeli businessman and one of the world's largest cutters and polishers of diamonds. Apparently, he is a friend of Vladimir Putin, and owns key New York City properties (Moorman, 2017). As mentioned before, in the early 2000s, Leviev established a partnership with the presidential family of José Eduardo dos Santos that helped dos Santos win the Angolan civil war and get rich. Obviously, Leviev also profited along with various other Israeli interests. As Moorman writes (2017, paragraph 17): "[In Angola] Lev Leviev profits. And with profits from the alluvial miners of Lunda North and the industrialized mine at Catoca in Lunda Sul, together with companies like Alrosa, they've broken the DeBeers monopoly."

It was the influence of Leviev, Gaydamak and others that led to the more profound intervention of Israel in Angola, transforming it into a fertile

field for experiments and enrichment for its former intelligence officers, who have found in Angola an opportunity to commercialise their skills in the open market. This created a revolving door between the state and the private sector, but most relevant, has provided Israel with a living laboratory for its spytech start-ups. Africa, and in this context Angola, is seen as a kind of backyard where newly retired Israeli military and intelligence officers as well as adventurers in search of wealth can develop their technologies and skills in a virtuous (or vicious) circle with the motherland by learning from what they apply and develop in Angola and by testing what is produced in Israel in Africa. At the same time, this is a place where law and order are mostly absent, allowing Israeli millionaires to increase their wealth and thus contribute to Israel's prosperity. In a way, for Israel, Angola is like the wild west of the United States in the 19th century.

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The Media Policy and Democracy Project (MPDP) was launched in 2012 and is a joint collaborative research project between the Department of Communication Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA), and Department of Journalism, Film and Television at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). The MPDP aims to promote participatory media and communications policymaking in the public interest in South Africa.

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This report was supported by a grant from Luminare.

