Morocco and the State of Israel

Upon becoming an independent state in 1948, Israel followed a periphery doctrine in its foreign affairs, seeking ties with regional countries – including Morocco – that were on the margins of the ongoing conflict with its Arab Neighbors. In the years following their independence, both Israel and Morocco needed Western assistance to deal with domestic challenges and foreign threats, especially communism and pan-Arabism. Therefore, for many years, Jerusalem and Rabat developed a strong secret relationship in three areas: emigration, intelligence and diplomacy.

Moroccan-Israeli ties further strengthened in 1959-1960, and then even more so upon the crowning of King Hassan II in 1961. The Mossad (Israel’s foreign intelligence agency) offered to train Morocco’s royal bodyguards, and Israel was also involved in training some of the kingdom’s intelligence services, which was regarded as largely disorganized at the time. Over the years, this secret connection between the two countries continued to thrive, and Israel remained active in supplying Morocco with weapons and intelligence. In the late 1950’s, King Hassan II shocked the Arab world during a visit in Lebanon when he publicly argued that the only solution for the enduring conflict was to make peace and incorporate Israel in the Arab League.

The ties between the two nations have proved exceptionally profitable for both populations. Economic trade between Morocco and Israel is today estimated at $100 million a year. Few people are aware of this special bond between the Jewish State and its Arab ally.

In the early twentieth century, Moroccan Jews held prominent positions in the royal government of Morocco and enjoyed respect and admiration. Even today, Jews continue to play a notable role in Morocco; in fact, the king retains a Jewish senior advisor, a position presently filled by Andre Azoulay.

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1 The Arabic word “dhimmi” literally means “protected citizen.” The formal status of dhimmi to which Jews in Muslim lands were assigned was an official and legalized state of second class citizenship.