
India-Israel Relations: Politico-Military Dimensions

Bidanda M Chengappa

Continuity characterises India-Israel relations with the Indian Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government pursuing policies similar to the earlier Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) towards Israel. India, owing to the Congress Party's pro-Palestinian position that identified with the late Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat, has, all along, remained uneasy about its relationship towards Israel. However, following Arafat's demise in November 2004 that dwarfed the Palestinian role in intra-Arab politics, India-Israel relations have emerged stronger than before. Indian foreign policy could theoretically be categorised into three concentric circles with the outermost circle related to the superpowers; the middle circle concerns the developing world that comprises Asia, Africa and Latin America;¹ and the innermost circle pertains to India's immediate neighbours in South Asia. While these distinctions are useful to comprehend the basics of Indian foreign policy priorities, the reality is far more complex. For instance, India-Pakistan relations would have a bearing on India- Israel relations or *vice versa*.

For India, the rationale for relations with Israel arose from a source for armament imports and a partner to combat terrorism. Israel had her own interests for cultivating ties with India that ranged from the need for extra-regional linkages that small states pursue in their search for security, an export market for her armament industry and an ally in the war against terrorism. Therefore, such a convergence of their mutual interests led to a natural alliance

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between the two countries, both significant states with strong strategic statures in their respective regions, namely South Asia and West Asia. While India-Israel relations remained covert during the Cold War period, they became overt during the post-Cold War period. To that extent, New Delhi-Tel Aviv ties remained hostage to the pulls and pressures of the strategic environment prevalent during the Cold War period. Similarly, their bilateral relations also proved responsive to the realignments that characterised the post-Cold War period.²

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to India during September 2003 comprises another step forward in India-Israel relations. The two countries have progressed from a covert to an overt diplomatic relationship with each other. Evidently the large Muslim Indian population prompted the government to pursue a covert relationship with Israel since the 1960s. Clearly, the Palestinian foreign minister's political journey to New Delhi, prior to Sharon's visit, only underlines India's need to pursue a balanced policy towards West Asia. Mr Sharon's visit was aimed to express solidarity with India in its struggle against terrorism. India and Israel have a joint working group on terrorism. Israel has adopted a hardline policy, unlike India, to tackle terrorism. Whether India can be inspired by Israel to reorient its policy to cope with terrorism or not is the question. However, to what extent have Israel's hardline policies successfully secured her territorial and national interests from terrorism?

India's balanced policy towards West Asia involved overt relations with the Arab states and covert relations with Israel—often enabled through back channel diplomacy. India permitted the establishment of a Jewish Agency in Mumbai since the 1950s – that amounted to a quasi-diplomatic office headed by an Israeli diplomat—to manage the interests of the Indian Jews who desired to travel/immigrate to Israel. Indications of New Delhi-Tel Aviv covert relations exist since the early 1960s when Israel provided India with small arms and ammunition in the wake of the 1962 Chinese aggression. Again, during the 1971 India-Pakistan War, Israel gave India 160 mm Tempella mortars. Similarly, covert ties continued with the secret visit of Gen Moshe Dayan in 1979 to meet Prime Minister Morarji Desai. During the early 1980s, some Indian military officers underwent counter-terrorism training in Israel.³

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Also, Israeli security specialists were consulted about protection systems in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's residence in the mid-1980s.

Cold War Considerations: Indian Inhibitions

India's relationship towards the Arab world was the sole consideration in the formulation of its policy towards Israel. It is, therefore, necessary to briefly go into the background of India's West Asia policy that, in turn, conditioned relations towards Israel. India's hostile relations with Pakistan – the homeland for the Muslims of South Asia – prompted the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to opt for development of good relations with the Muslim states of West Asia. Towards this objective, the Ministry of External Affairs established the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in 1950 to improve ties with West Asia through eminent Indian Muslims—political leaders and academics like the late Union Minister for Education Maulana Azad and the late President of India, Dr Zakir Hussain. These and other distinguished Indian Muslims often visited states in the region and interacted with important leaders in those countries to compensate for the inherent religio-cultural orientation of their leadership towards Pakistan.

The two broad components of India's policy towards the West Asian region and especially the United Arab Republic (UAR) were: (a) assist Arab nationalism and self-determination without the intervention of Western industrialised democracies; (b) endorsement of the Arab position in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Accordingly, India sided with the Arabs and during the creation of Israel in 1948, endorsed the Arab position on Palestine and voted against the partition of Palestine into "Arab and Jewish Zones of Administration". Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli hostilities and the subsequent truce, the original boundaries proposed by the UN were considerably altered for the two states. Post-armistice, Israel emerged with enlarged territory and the Arab zone was absorbed by the adjacent states of Egypt and Jordan. As a result, the Arabs who were displaced from their homeland continue to live in refugee camps in these countries.

While India adopted a pro-Arab policy, New Delhi accorded recognition to the Jewish state of Israel in 1954, six years after the war, but did not establish diplomatic relations with her. The absence of diplomatic relations was purely to prevent strains in relations with the Arab states that were not yet reconciled towards the establishment of the Jewish state. The other considerations for Indian policy were that Israel was not responsive towards the Palestinian refugees and had collaborated with the Western colonial powers that proved detrimental to regional peace. Similarly, the Israeli military action in the Sinai Peninsula of

Egypt in 1956 was highlighted as an instance of Tel Aviv's nexus with the former colonial powers of the region. As a result, Nehru said on August 07, 1958, at a Press conference in response to a query, that lack of diplomatic relations with Israel was "not a matter of high principle" but pertained to irritants in Arab-Israel ties.⁴

Again, India adopted a pro-Arab policy in the post-1956 Suez episode period. However, this impacted adversely on her relations with the West – particularly Britain. Pakistan was far more measured in her response to the Anglo-French intervention than India. The fallout of this Indian posture was that Britain shed her earlier neutrality towards the two Commonwealth members and supported the Pakistani position over Kashmir in the UN. Likewise, India's pro-Arab policy again manifested consistently for the next 17 years, especially during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli conflicts that were the highpoints. However, the lack of reciprocity in the Arab policy towards India was evident during the 1962 India-China conflict, the 1965 India-Pakistan hostilities, and the 1971 India-Pakistan War. In 1962, while Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia supported India, Syria, Iraq and the UAR did not take a pro-Indian position. These three countries only suggested mediation or arbitration while the UAR also recommended demilitarisation as a precondition to negotiations. The Arab policy was based on two considerations, namely Chinese diplomatic influence in the Arab world and their regional attitude characterised by a lack of interest beyond their own borders.

The litmus test of India's pro-Arab policy proved to be a failure during the 1965 India-Pakistan War. While New Delhi expected the Arab states to consider the case on its merits, the reality was different. Jordan totally supported the Pakistani case at the UN followed by Saudi Arabia's demand for collective Arab condemnation of the Indian position at the September 1965 Casablanca Conference. While President Nasser successfully blocked this move, the final communiqué released on September 17, 1965, clearly did not support India and only called for a termination of hostilities between the two belligerents. Eventually, the Arab states again adopted a pro-Pakistan posture in the 1971 India-Pakistan War.

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For India, its pro-Arab policy proved to be a failure because it was unable to offset the religious factors between the Arab states and Pakistan vis-à-vis her national interests. To that extent, India-Arab relations based on historic and cultural considerations were inadequate and New Delhi desperately needed to redefine her policy towards West Asia in terms of mutual interests and *realpolitik*.

Israel and South Asia: Confidential Diplomacy

Israel has relations with various South Asian countries that include Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its ties with Nepal and Sri Lanka have a strong military dimension given that the Israeli Army helped to establish the Nepalese Army's parachute school in the 1960s and maintains a diplomatic mission in Kathmandu.⁵ In the case of Sri Lanka, Israel has sold some patrol boats to the Sri Lankan Navy. The late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, well aware of the nuances of international politics, especially the role of confidential diplomacy that is conducted through intelligence agencies, established a back channel relationship with Israel since a front channel was not desirable.⁶ She felt relations between the two intelligence agencies were necessary to monitor developments that could threaten India and Israel.

The identifiable threats were the military relationship among Pakistan, China and North Korea, particularly after then Pakistan Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Pyongyang in 1971 to establish an equation with North Korea. Israel was worried over reports that Pakistan Army officers were training the Libyans and Iranians to handle Chinese and North Korean military equipment.⁷ According to unconfirmed media reports, the Israeli leader Gen Moshe Dayan had interacted with the Indian representatives in Kathmandu, besides a meeting with then Prime Minister Morarji Desai in New Delhi. Islamabad believed Dayan's visit was linked to a prospective covert joint operation by India and Israel to terminate Pakistan's nuclear programme. Israel also had aggressive credentials with its aerial attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 and this fuelled Pakistan's fears about the vulnerability of her nuclear installation at Kahuta.

The late Pakistani President Zia-ul Haq decided to reassure Israel that the Pakistani nuclear programme would not threaten her national interests.⁸ As the US had close relations with both Pakistan and Israel, Washington was supposed to have aided initial contacts between these two states created on the basis of religion. In a sense, Israel was confident that the US would not allow Pakistan's

nuclear capability to threaten Israel. Perhaps this explains the Israeli position that abstains from any reference to Pakistan in the context of preemptive strikes against the nuclear programmes of Iraq, Iran and Libya.⁹ As a result, President Zia opted for a back channel between the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate and the legendary Israeli Mossad through their officers with their embassies in Washington, D C.¹⁰

Apparently the ISI offered Mossad information about the Libyan, Syrian, Jordanian and Saudi Arabian militaries.¹¹ This was possible because Pakistani military officers were often posted on deputation to various Arab countries that enabled direct access to critical intelligence, relevant to Israeli security interests. Evidently, Pakistan perceives a conventional military threat from India-Israel ties. The Pakistani military leadership hero-worships their Israeli counterparts for innovative military tactics and strategy.¹² Both countries are endowed with relatively smaller populations compared to their neighbours, lack strategic depth and are confronted by hostile neighbours. Therefore, Islamabad and Tel Aviv both recognise the importance of intelligence agencies as a first line of defence.

Pakistan lacks a direct conflict with Israel and seriously considers establishment of diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.¹³ Islamabad feels that since the Palestinians themselves have diplomatically engaged Israel, they too could do so. Their diplomats have interacted with each other in foreign capitals for several decades. According to academic PR Kumaraswamy, a West Asia specialist, "Influential Jewish leaders like Edmund de Rothschild have privately operated, and at times funded efforts to further Pakistan-Israel normalization."¹⁴

The Indian government successfully lobbied with the US Jewish lobby for support to declare Pakistan as a terrorist state.¹⁵ The US State Department put Pakistan on a 'watch- list' for six months in 1993. The Clinton Administration convinced the then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to dismiss Lt Gen Javed Nasir, then director general of the ISI. The Americans were unhappy that the ISI refused to comply with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) directive to buy unused Stinger missiles from the Afghan Mujahideen, then in power in Kabul. Thereafter, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who returned to power towards the end of 1993, reportedly intensified the ISI's liaison with the Mossad. She also started to develop linkages with the American Jewish lobby. Benazir is said to have had a secret meeting in New York with a senior Israeli emissary, who flew to the US during her visit to Washington, DC in 1995 for talks with Clinton.¹⁶

President Pervez Musharraf as a major general is supposed to have advocated the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel. The new defence technology relationship between India and Israel, with the Jewish state's emergent role as the second-largest source of armaments, worries Musharraf. He is the first Pakistani leader to make a public pronouncement over diplomatic relations with Israel. While the Pakistan Army leadership subscribes to a similar view, the religious right in the country could prove to be a serious problem through their capability to mobilise 'street' power against such a move. Musharraf has publicly acknowledged the need to review Pakistan's relations with Israel. He explained to a television channel that this would be done in consultation with Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) members. Israel on its part has assured Islamabad that it would adopt an even-handed policy towards both India and Pakistan after normalisation of diplomatic ties. Pakistan has yet to accord diplomatic recognition to Israel. For Israel, diplomatic ties with Pakistan could soften enmity towards the Jewish state in other Muslim countries. Israeli officials feel that relations with Pakistan could initiate ties with other Muslim countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh in the region. While the first Israeli Embassy in South Asia was established at Kathmandu and the next in New Delhi, perhaps, Islamabad would be the third capital for Israel to establish a diplomatic presence. Tel Aviv needs to review its South Asia policy. Today, Tel Aviv categorises India as part of Southeast Asia and not South Asia.

For Pakistan, the recognition of Israel is sensitive, akin to the Kashmir issue. Accordingly Musharraf's statement over a review of Pakistani policy towards Israel elicited displeasure from right wing elements and religious parties in Pakistan.¹⁷ Lt Gen Tariq Aziz, the principal secretary of the National Security Council, in his first Press conference at Lahore, said Pakistan is prepared to accept the reality of Israel if the entire Muslim world does so. Interestingly, the perception that Islamabad that a "mind-less" anti-Israel policy has only succeeded in pushing Tel Aviv closer towards New Delhi. Also, Islamabad believes that a Jewish lobby controls the American media and, therefore, Pakistan gets a bad press in the US.

Turkey normalised diplomatic relations with Israel several years ago and Pakistan under Musharraf positioned the progressive-liberal Muslim state as a role model for his country to pursue. To that extent, this could be a source of inspiration to Pakistani foreign policy that is desperately attempting to change course in the post-Cold War environment aimed to enhance its national interests. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who enjoys a personal rapport with Musharraf, had visited Pakistan in 2003 prior to his departure for the US.

Perhaps this Islamabad-Istanbul relationship has the potential to facilitate a rapprochement in Pakistan-Israel relations.¹⁸

Post-Cold War: Normalisation Phase

The transformation of the global strategic environment towards the late 1980s and early the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, India's most significant supplier of military equipment, proved to be a serious national security setback. Also, the 1991 Gulf War revealed irritants between the Arab states and demanded a new Indian policy towards West Asia. Moreover, India also wanted to get involved in the "peace process" at that time in the Middle East. In the post-Soviet world, India was keen on US support, diplomatically and technologically. As a result of these considerations, India and Israel initiated talks for diplomatic ties in June 1991. These talks were possible due to the covert relationship that characterised New Delhi-Tel Aviv ties since three decades.

During the early 1990s, when young Israeli tourists visited the Kashmir Valley Pakistan suspected they were actually Israeli Army officers masquerading as tourists to train Indian security forces in counter-terrorism operations.¹⁹ The ISI propaganda inspired a series of terrorist attacks on the unsuspecting Israeli tourists. One was slain, another kidnapped. The Kashmiri Muslim Diaspora in the US feared the attacks would alienate the influential Jewish community who, they felt, could lobby the US government and turn it against Kashmiri organisations clamouring for independence.²⁰ Soon after, presumably caving into pressure, the terrorists released the kidnapped Israeli tourist. During the negotiations for his release, Israeli government officials, including senior intelligence operatives, arrived in New Delhi. Their interaction with Indian officials also gave a fillip to the larger considerations behind the formalisation of diplomatic relations between New Delhi and Tel Aviv in 1992.²¹

India established diplomatic relations in January 1992 with Israel and since then has expanded various facets to their ties in trade, agriculture, economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. The volume of trade between the two countries in 1999 stood at \$1 billion. Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao deserves credit for normalisation of relations with Israel. He boldly overruled the Congress Party's and the government's objection on January 29, 1992, for overt relations with Israel.

Geo-Strategic Commonalities

India and Israel are both liberal democracies in the region and enjoy good relations with the US. They both anticipate a threat from political Islam to their national interests. For Israel, India's regional significance is enormous. Lt Gen Vinay Shankar (Retd) opines:

In Asia, India marked the eastern periphery of the Islamic threat. With Pakistan in possession of the "Islamic bomb" and claiming the leadership of the Islamic world, Israel is naturally sensitive to developments in this country. India, like Israel, is the victim of continued terrorist violence sponsored by elements that perhaps have links with each other and may be share the same patronage. Depending on developments, India can obviously play a critical role in any crisis situation. In any case, fighting terrorism is a common cause between India and Israel and that is sufficient reason for strengthening bilateral ties.²²

Professor Isaac Ben Israel (former Maj Gen), comments on the similarities in the regional strategic environments that condition the two countries, and states:²³

Both have hostile Muslim neighbours and both constitute 'islands of democracy' in a surrounding sea of totalitarianism. Both are forced to confront external threats arising from their neighbours' territorial aspirations, and reinforced by strong religious motives. This animosity constitutes an expression both of very different 'civilisational' values and of vast economic disparities, reflecting the great differences in culture, religion and form of government. These realities dictate very similar strategic interests for India and Israel.

According to Professor Ben Israel, the straight stretch eastwards that an airliner flies from Tel Aviv to New Delhi comprises a variety of regimes in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Israel is sandwiched between Egypt on its west, Lebanon and Jordan on its east with Saudi Arabia on its southeast. He points out that the only democracy in the vicinity of Israel is Turkey. In his words, therefore, "The huge expanse between India and Israel is entirely Islamic. The strategic significance of this reality can hardly be underestimated."²⁴

Brig Subhash Kapila (Retd) observes that, India and Israel are democracies and have survived in a sea of hostility, surrounded by implacable adversaries and a heavily militarised security environment. Both nations have fought wars

in nearly every decade of their existence. Both countries also have been facing external and internal security threats in the form of Islamic terrorism and sabotage. It should have been, therefore, natural for India to reach out to Israel in terms of establishment of meaningful political and economic relations. India's record has been otherwise, Kapila observes.²⁵

Security and Defence Dimension

The security and defence dimension to India-Israel relations assumes immense importance. The two sides have entered into a strategic policy dialogue wherein their respective National Security Councils dialogue with each other. While military technology ties forms the foundation, border management, intelligence cooperation and counter-terrorism supplement the bilateral relationship. The Israeli defence industry is unique because the country's compulsory military service creates soldier-scientists wherein defence scientists also develop a strong orientation to combat requirements. This tends to minimise the development cycle time to design new military equipment. Israeli avionics will now be used to upgrade the MiG-21 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force. Interestingly, Israel procured the pilotless target aircraft Lakshaya made by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.²⁶

India proposes to obtain Israeli assistance to train four battalions of nearly 3,000 soldiers in specialised counter-insurgency operations in desert, mountainous and jungle terrains, besides counter-hijack and hostage crisis situations. The *Jerusalem Post* of February 3, 2003, asserts that India seeks security expertise from Israel due to its inability to manage infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir, besides other stretches of the India-Pakistan border that resulted in a high profile attack on its Parliament.

India also aims to adapt Israeli border management techniques to secure its territory from terrorist infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir. Former Border Security Force (BSF) Director General (DG) Ram Mohan had accompanied then Home Minister L K Advani during his visit to Israel. Similarly, intelligence cooperation is evident between the two sides given that confidential diplomacy

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preceded overt diplomatic relations. Intelligence agencies conduct confidential diplomacy and, therefore, make intelligence functions an extension of diplomacy. Former National Security Guards DG Ashok Tandon too visited Israel to interact with the Israeli internal security service.

The convergence of Indo-Israeli interests and their strategic significance was outlined by the National Security Adviser Brijesh Mishra in his address to the American Jewish Committee, wherein he argued that democratic countries that are the prime targets of international terrorism should form a “viable alliance” and develop multilateral mechanisms to counter the menace.²⁷ He identified India, the US and Israel as countries fitting that description. “Such an alliance would have the political will and moral authority to take bold decisions in extreme cases of terrorist provocation,” he mentioned.

The constructive aspect of the proposal signifies creation of a strong, stable force against the potential epicentre of fundamentalism and radicalism. The main purpose is to keep the theatre of the Indian Ocean and its eastern approaches to Europe free from radical and fundamental forces that are showing increasing signs of consolidation. From an Indian perspective, the importance of this cannot be undermined, particularly in the context of Pakistan’s continuing proxy war and the turbulent regional scenario increasingly exacerbated by instability in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan.

The convergence of the two countries was highlighted during the June 22, 2003, Joint Working Group meeting, where the Deputy Director General Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zvi Gabey, said, “We find ourselves in the same camp that fights terrorism and we have to develop our relationship according to that.” Indian Foreign Ministry officials acknowledged this and said during the same meeting, “India finds it increasingly beneficial to learn from Israel’s experience in dealing with terrorism since Israel, too, has long suffered from cross-border terrorism.” Under the circumstances, the emerging understanding to forge tripartite cooperation between India-US and Israel to jointly fight the menace of cross-border and international terrorism, must be seen as an important step

in preserving peace and security in the region by harnessing common resources and need not be construed against any particular region or interests.

From the Israeli perspective, India can assist in offering naval and other facilities that Tel Aviv lacks to further strengthen the relationship, states Professor Martin Sherman in an article published in the *Jerusalem Post*, titled, "From Conflict to Convergence: India and Israel Forge a Solid Strategic Alliance". The writer argues that an alliance with India was important for Israel as it intended to develop seaborne defence capability. In view of the miniscule territorial dimension of Israel, its defence planners are increasingly aware of the crucial significance of the marine and sub-marine theatres. The vulnerability of Israel's land-based military installations grows with the acquisition of modern weaponry by other countries in the region.

Strategic thinking in Israel tends to give prominence to the Indian Ocean as a location for logistical infrastructure. For the establishment and operation of such a maritime venture, cooperation with the Indian Navy would be vital. The article said, "In this regard, it is especially significant that in 2000, Israeli submarines reportedly conducted test launches capable of carrying nuclear warheads in the waters of the Indian Ocean off the Sri Lankan coast." Sherman adds that an alliance between India and Israel, openly endorsed by the US, would create a potent stabilising force in the region, which, together with like-minded regimes such as Turkey, could contribute significantly toward facing down the force of radical extremism so hostile to Indo-Israeli and American interests in Western and Central Asia.

The article argued that considerations beyond regional stability made a vibrant India-Israeli axis a clear interest. For example, in the growing balance of geo-strategic power, the growing Chinese challenge to US primacy will almost invariably dictate the need for a regional counterweight to Chinese domination. While India may balk at the sheer audacity of such an obvious enunciation, it needs to consciously debate its long-term strategic interests, and must lay the foundation for it to become a reckonable player on the world stage by developing technological and military capabilities concurrently with economic development. Lt Gen Vinay Shankar (Retd) observes that in India's case, its security posture has improved considerably with the infusion of a wide variety of defence equipment from Israel, in some cases with technologies that were not accessible to India from other sources. If this momentum is maintained, India may witness a significant enlargement of its strategic space as an enhancement of its capability to combat terrorism and militancy, he points out.²⁸

Concluding Observations

During the Cold War period, India's domestic politics and principles of non-alignment largely influenced the decision against formal diplomatic ties with Israel. It also maintained strong ties with the Arab states and supported their policy initiatives during the first few decades of Israel's creation. The antagonism between Israel and the Arab states, hence, prevented India from establishing formal ties with Israel. Also, in the early years of the Cold War, most Arab states did not have wholly amicable ties with India's arch-rival, Pakistan. Hence, India was strategically closer to these Arab states.

To summarise the Cold War period, New Delhi's policy priorities towards West Asia were characterised by the following imperatives: Afro-Asian solidarity based on anti-colonialism, support for allies on the Kashmir issue, to neutralise Pakistan's influence among the Arab states, dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf and on exporting a large workforce to the Gulf states that subsequently sent back huge revenues to India. It must be noted that India did recognise the state of Israel in 1954. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi then realising the gradual influence of Israel, decided to begin confidential diplomatic ties. India had a covert relationship with Israel for two decades that began from the 1970s, through the 1980s and culminated into an overt relationship during the 1990s.

In the post-Cold War period, India's largest source of military technology dried up with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hence, India looked to gradually forge strong relations with the only remaining superpower, the United States of America. Due to the strength of the Jewish lobby within the US, New Delhi gradually acknowledged that a formal diplomatic relationship was pragmatic. Yet India took four years to formalise the military component in diplomatic relations with Israel. While normalisation of India-Israel relations took shape in 1992, it was only four years later, in 1997, that the first Indian defence adviser was posted to the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv.

In a sense, the growing India-Israel relationship could connote a dilution in Indo-Arab ties. While this may be impressionistic, an appropriate interpretation would be that India attempted to correct its lopsided West Asia policy, pursued for four decades. However, the Arab states did not reciprocate India's support for them on the international stage. Their support of Pakistan was a case in point. It was obvious that the Arab states shared stronger cultural and religious links with Pakistan and, hence, India gradually found that Israel was a more viable ally. To that extent, New Delhi-Tel Aviv ties represent a prominent policy shift.

Notes

1. Baljit Singh, *Indian Foreign Policy: An Analysis* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1976) p. 20.
2. Bharat Karnad, "Our Track to Tel Aviv," *The Indian Express*, September 02, 2003; also see Farah Naaz, "Indo-Israeli Relations: An Evolutionary Perspective", *Strategic Analysis*, May 1999, (2) Vol 23 (New Delhi: IDSA).
3. Bidanda M Chengappa "Indo-Israeli Relations: The Great Leap Forward," *Indian Defence Review* (New Delhi: Lancer Publications).
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1961), pp. 414-415.
5. According to a senior Royal Nepal Army lieutenant general in a private conversation with this writer at New Delhi in January 2001.
6. V Balachandran writes: "The late RN Kao, chief of our foreign intelligence agency, himself a strategic visionary and his able colleague, Mr Sankaran Nair, worked out the architecture of this relationship, covering in the course of time, even sensitive defence cooperation" "Remember Gandhi, Mr Shalom," *The Asian Age*, September 09, 2003, p. 17; also see "R&AW and Mossad: The Secret Link", rediff.com/news/2003/sep/08spec.htm
7. *Ibid.*
8. P R Kumaraswamy writes that Israel sought a separate understanding with Pakistan over non-attack on nuclear facilities. Sharon's senior aide Avaram Tahir reportedly visited Pakistan in the mid-1980s in order to dispel fears and even concluded certain military and conventional arms deals with President Zia-ul Haq. Kumaraswamy cites Shlomo Aronson, *The Politics and Strategy of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East: Opacity, Theory and Practise, 1960-1991 – An Israeli Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992). P R Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil: Israel-Pakistan Relations* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre of Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2000).
9. After Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests in May 1998, Israeli Deputy Defence Silvan Shalom stated: "We do not view Pakistan as our enemy. Pakistan has never been Israel's enemy. Pakistan has never threatened Israel. Consequently, we do not view this development as leading to a situation where the weapons are aimed against Israel." n. 5.
10. Chengappa, n. 3.
11. *Ibid.*
12. The Indian Embassy in Canada hosted a reception in honour of Prime Minister Nehru and, among others, the Israeli and Pakistani ambassadors were invited. Reporting on his conversation with his Pakistani counterpart, Israeli Ambassador MS Comay

- recorded: "The Pakistan High Commissioner Osman Ali Baig publicly came to me, shook me by the hand and warmly congratulated me on the wonderful show 'your splendid little army put up in beating the Egyptians.' His only regret was that the British and the French had intervened; otherwise we might have gone right through to Cairo." n. 5; also see Brig Syed AI Tirmazi, *Profiles in Intelligence* (Lahore: Combined Printers, 1995) wherein there is an element of admiration for Israeli intelligence.
13. In September 1997, former Pakistan Chief of Army Staff Gen Mirza Aslam Beg stated: "Pakistan has no direct conflict with Israel; therefore, we are a third party to the dispute... We have no conflict with Israel", n. 5.
 14. Ibid.
 15. Chengappa, n. 3.
 16. Ibid.
 17. *The Hindu*, June 23, 2003.
 18. Ibid.
 19. n. 5.
 20. Chengappa, n. 3.
 21. Ibid.
 22. Lt Gen Vinay Shankar (Retd), "Arab-Israel Relations: Can India be the Fulcrum?" November 23, 2003, <http://world-mediamonitors.net/layout/set/>
 23. Maj Gen (reserve) Professor Isaac Bene-Israel, "The Indian Israeli Case," *Indian Defence Review*, October-December 2002, pp. 79-80.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Dr Subash Kapila, "India-Israel Relations: The Imperatives for Enhanced Strategic Cooperation", <http://www.ssaag.org/paper13/.html>
 26. Ibid. For a detailed description of Israel's techno-military capabilities, see Farah Naaz, "Israel's Arms Industry," *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi: IDSA), March 2000.
 27. http://www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/2003/nsa_ajc_may_8_03.htm
 28. n. 5.