



Israel and India:

The Course of Relations and Future Scenarios

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This study monitors and analyses key indicators in India's foreign policy over the past three decades, particularly after India initiated diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. This shift coincided with significant structural transformations that resulted from the end of the cold war and break-up of the Soviet Union. As a consequence, international and regional balances of power changed. Globalisation and liberalisation have run deep in inter-State relations.

The importance of this subject derives from several reasons. In the first place, this study contributes to bridging a wide gap in knowledge in the process of investigating India as a civilisation and political phenomenon. A limited number of Arab researchers, including Palestinians, have published in-depth, insightful, and analytical unbiased research on India, Indian internal political system, and parameters of Indian foreign policy.

Secondly, based on presentation and analysis, the study proposes a set of political and strategic recommendations on how to contain the growing relations between Israel and India. These ties have a significant bearing not only on the question of Palestine, but also on regional and Arab system as a whole.

Introduction

A close look at key international developments in the post-cold war era unveils a transformation, which was drawn on the new world map. In part, some Asian states sought an advanced position in this "new world" by playing an effective and influential

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role. This would provide an appropriate entry point to transform into a global power and take part in interactions of the international political landscape.¹

Of these states, India has had a strong ambition for a strategic rise, either at a regional or a global level.² To start with, India is the second most populous country in the world after China, the second largest in purchasing power, the third largest in the size of armed forces, the seventh largest in naval forces, and the first to reach Mars. Additionally, India is a secular, democratic country and possesses nuclear weapons. As a rising power, it is expected that India will have influence on international affairs. Against this backdrop, in 1994, India demanded that it have a permanent seat on the Security Council.³

After the end of the cold war, India sought to invigorate its foreign policy tools and expand the scope of its diplomatic activity towards a number of countries around the world. During the post-independence period, in 1947, Indian foreign policy was impacted by global propositions of the Non-Aligned Movement, which were premised on anti-colonialism and support of peoples aspiring for freedom and independence, including the Palestinian people. In the light of emerging new international factors and developments, India tended to give preference to economic and strategic interests and considerations over the ideological factor.⁴

In the post-cold war period, these transformations in international politics particularly included collapse of the Soviet Union – the close ally of, and primary arms supplier to, India. The international system shifted from a bipolar to a unipolar world led by the United States of America. A political settlement process between the Palestinians, Arabs and Israel was initiated. India also experienced significant economic challenges. These, and other, factors highlighted India's need for relations with the United State, which became the superpower in the new world order.⁵

While it was in dire need for arms, India sought to strengthen its relations with Washington, emerge from its economic crisis, and confront challenges in South Asia, particularly in relation to “terrorism”. Therefore, India's leadership found out that speeding up the process of building diplomatic relations with Israel, Washington's strategic ally, was an important entry point to achieve these, and other, objectives. On 29 January 1992, the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and India was announced. This was four decades after New Delhi had recognised Tel Aviv in 1950. During this period, India-Israel relations were tense and frigid at times, and controversial and discreet at others. Meantime, Israel made an unrelenting effort to penetrate the Indian



position with a view to developing and scaling up relations with New Delhi. However, strong Indian-Arab relations during the cold war and the influence of internal Indian political factors at the time thwarted Israeli attempts.

Palestine in Indian foreign policy during the cold war period

In the Indian foreign policy literature, the question of Palestine was associated with the oppressed peoples' right to self-determination. It was unreasonable that small islands scattered across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans gain independence while at the same time Palestine continued to be under direct colonisation.⁶ For India, the question of Palestine was also indicative of racial discrimination on a global scale as New Delhi viewed Zionism as a form of global racism.⁷ On that basis, during the cold war era, the parameters of foreign policy were developed by successive Indian governments towards the question of Palestine. Indian diplomacy gave weight to the international dimension of the question of Palestine and supported the United Nations role and rightful place to defend Palestine and the Palestinian people.

As the Zionist entity occupied Palestine, displaced the indigenous Palestinian population and confiscated Palestinian land and properties, India condemned this occupation. It also voted in favour of all United Nations resolutions, rejecting the Israeli occupation and demanding that displaced Palestinians return to their homeland, that the Palestinian people be enabled to restore their rights, and establish their own independent state on their territory. In the meantime, New Delhi deplored the occupation of Jerusalem and changing the city's Arab and Islamic character. Furthermore, India categorically rejected the seizure of Palestinian land and construction of military and civilian establishments and settlement compounds to bring in and settle the Jews from countries around the world.

With the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland, India's diplomacy worked towards advancing the international dimension of the question of Palestine. It supported the United Nations role to be in a proper position to defend Palestine and the Palestinian people. To do so, India garnered multilateral international diplomacy and kept the question of Palestine away from major power rivalries and cold war polarisations. This way, the Palestinian people and question of Palestine would not be a testing ground for wrangling between superpowers and influential states.⁸



This supportive position of India was informed by the just cause of the question of the question of Palestine. It was based on the Arab and Indian shared history of confrontation with the British colonisation. In the context of the Non-Aligned Movement, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser built a strong relationship with India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. All final statements issued following the meetings of the Movement included an item specific to the question of Palestine. In addition, the Arabs and Indians had interlocking interests, particularly in relation to economic exchanges, oil, and Indian workers in the Arabian Gulf states.

New Delhi upheld its positions in support of the question of Palestine before and after India gained independence in 1947. Before independence, together a number of states, India submitted a proposed plan to the United Nations, including a solution for the question of Palestine based on a federal perception. The proposal implied an unequivocal refusal of the Partition Plan, which the United States and many Western countries made efforts and exerted pressure to pass and approve. The Partition Plan culminated in the creation of a colonial Zionist entity, reflected in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Following India's independence, Indian-Arab talks never failed to make reference to the question of Palestine. All final statements issued following the meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement included an item specific to the question of Palestine. India confirmed its full support of legitimate Arab rights and viewed the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In 1975, India allowed the PLO to open a representative office in New Delhi. Ever since, India has consistently stressed the inevitable representation of the PLO in any negotiations on Palestine as an equal partner with all other parties to the negotiation process.⁹

In 1980, India granted full diplomatic recognition to the PLO, together with upgrading the PLO representative office into an embassy with full diplomatic immunities and privileges. At the same time, India refused Israel's request to convert its consulate in Mumbai into a diplomatic mission. It further declared Yosef Hasson, then Israeli Consul General, *persona non grata*, demanding that he leave India in June 1982. Hasson had issued a scathing criticism of India, which he alleged showed too strong a bias towards the Arabs. Setting a precedent in its modern history, that was the first time India demanded that a foreign representative leave the Indian territory. At the time, proven



news reports circulated on the United States putting enormous pressure on India to avoid a decision on shutting down the Israeli Consulate General.¹⁰

Having established full diplomatic relations with Israel, India had already adopted a complex, but intelligent, foreign policy that attempted to reconcile contradictions and deepen its relations with Israel. At the same time, India maintained political and economic relations with the Palestinians.¹¹

After the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established, India focused on aid to the Palestinian people. In addition to diplomatic action, India launched many projects, particularly in health, education and other sectors. India welcomed the Palestinian elections held in January 2006. In spite of Israel's contention, Ohm Prakash, Representative of India to the PNA, met with Ismail Haniyeh, then Palestinian Prime Minister. India also participated in the Annapolis Conference of November 2007.

India's policy towards Israel following its establishment

After the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, with a view to enhancing Israel's geopolitical situation, Israeli foreign policy actively worked towards increasing the number of states, which would recognise Israel. In particular, Israel was geographically positioned in a hostile environment not only in terms of geographical criteria, but also in view of cultural, civilisational and psychological considerations.

As the Arab milieu refused to engage with, recognise and open up to Israel, Israeli leaders looked for friends, allies and channels of communication with Asian and African states. Along this vein, Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was devoted to advancing the Periphery Doctrine in order to bolster ties with states and nations on the periphery of the Arab world, particularly Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia. The Periphery Doctrine aimed at improving the strategic environment by cordoning off the Arab world on all sides and breaking the Arab isolation of Israel. It was also designed to tighten Israel's various ties with Asian key actors, particularly India, China, Japan, and South Korea.¹²

Based on this vision, ever since it was established, Israel has sought to promote strategic and economic partnerships with India, which plays a significant regional and international role. After Ben-Gurion proclaimed the State of Israel, Israeli Foreign



Minister Moshe Sharett sent a telegram to Nehru, requesting a diplomatic recognition of Israel. In June 1948, Nehru explained the obstacles to such a recognition, asserting that it (the recognition) would cause an abrupt change in India's policy in support of the Palestinians. It would be interpreted as an encroachment on Muslims, especially in view of the fact that India was experiencing internal stress and sectarian tension. The Indian Peninsula would be partitioned on the basis of religious considerations. In his letters, Nehru wrote: "Our government cannot out of a sudden change its policy. If we do so, and regardless of our statements in the past, we will be accused of being without principles."¹³

Based on Nehru's statements, the Indian government decided to put off recognition of the State of Israel. Meantime, Israeli leaders continued to urge New Delhi to recognise Israel. In this context, Nehru stated: "The government of India received a request from the State of Israeli for recognition. We suggest that we do not take action in this matter for the time being. India cannot play an effective role in this conflict at the current stage, be it diplomatic or otherwise."¹⁴

However, Nehru did not rule out the possibility of future recognition in light of changing circumstances. He confirmed that "this decision is not final. The matter will undoubtedly be reconsidered in light of subsequent developments, including a final resolution of the United Nations." Nehru also asserted that "while it will be recognised as an entity, a diplomatic exchange will not be in place with Israel." He summed up his country's policy by saying: "Our public policy in the past was not biased towards the Arab, but at the same time was not hostile to the Jews. This policy will continue to be in force."¹⁵

To this avail, an Indian political report summarised the government of India's official position towards the establishment of the State of Israel as follows:

1. India stands up against the forced displacement of the Arabs and Palestinians from their homes.
2. Israel occupied areas beyond the borders prescribed by the United Nations Resolution on Partition. This is viewed as an Israeli violation.
3. Israel is established on sectarian/religious grounds.
4. The colonisation of Palestine was essentially an extension of a broader Western colonial process.¹⁶



In spite of India's disinclination, Israel maintained an extensive effort for recognition by India. In January 1948, Israel dispatched Eliahu Epstein, Jewish representative to the United Nations, to New Delhi in order to convince the Indian leadership of Jewish demands. In August 1948, Eliahu Eilat, Israeli ambassador to the United States, met with Sir Benegal Rama Rau, Indian ambassador. Rau told Eilat that India was adopting a cautious policy in dealing with Israel in view of the large Muslim minority in the country. On the other hand, Eilat suggested that relations between both countries be initiated on economic and cultural levels well before diplomatic ties are in place. In the same period, the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett met with Nehru's sister, who represented India at a United Nations meeting in Paris. She promised to arrange a meeting between Nehru and Sharett. The proposed meeting faced opposition by Muslim clerics and members of parliament, however. Opponents included Abul Kalam Azad, first Minister of Education in the Indian government following India's independence, who not only vigorously opposed any relations with Israel, but also supported the Arab struggle.¹⁷

Indian policy did not only froze its relations with the Hebrew State. That period witnessed changes at two levels. Firstly, in the context of the political and geopolitical situation in the Middle East, the proclamation of Israel transformed the region and made the existence of the State of Israel a reality. Secondly, in view of internal transformations within India, Gandhi's assassination in 1948, partition of India, and consequent internal and external pressures on the Indian government were so profound that induced India to grant legal and *de facto* recognition of Israel. As one of the first Asian states, India recognised Israel on 17 September 1950.¹⁸ Several months later, Israel inaugurated a commercial office in Mumbai, which ultimately shifted into a consular mission in June 1953. The transition followed a visit by Walter Eytan, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to India in 1952. During his visit, Eytan met with Nehru and other Indian leaders.¹⁹

India's recognition of Israel was a result of the right wing movement within the Congress Party. Right-wing parties exerted pressure on Nehru, after he became India's first prime minister following independence. This pressure campaign was spearheaded by the Sardar Patel, India's first Minister of Home Affairs and leader of the Swatantra Party, who demanded that full diplomatic relations be established with Israel. Some observers are of the view that India's recognition of Israel, two years after it had been proclaimed, did not indicate any hesitation on part of the Indian position. India had already been in regular contact with Israel.²⁰ Late recognition was due to the fact India had been preoccupied



with the conflict with Pakistan in 1948. India was concerned that its recognition of Israel would negatively impact relations with Arab and Islamic countries on one hand, or give rise to grudge among Muslims in India on the other.²¹

Despite the extensive efforts it made in its early years to upgrade relations with India, Israel had negligible success. Indian officials attributed their reluctance to normalise relations with Israel to a lack of common visions and principled values between both sides. What kept Israel and India apart far outweighed what brought them together. These parities specifically included:²²

1. Britain was the colonising Power of India. It was also Britain that issued the Balfour Declaration, according to which it pledged to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine.
2. India was among the first countries to support peoples' right to self-determination and national independence across Asia and Africa. On the other end, Israel was illegally established on occupied territory. Israel also had strong relations with France, which then occupied and refused to grant independence to Algeria.
3. India waged wars against China and Pakistan to maintain its territorial integrity. However, the legitimacy of India as a full-fledged independent state was never called into question by any of its neighbours. By contrast, since it was established to present day, the legitimacy of Israel has not been recognised by the majority of Arab and Islamic states.
4. The decision on the establishment of Israel had a special relevance from an Indian perspective. Israel was founded in the same way as India was, namely, by partition on the basis of religion. In the case of the Indian Peninsula, India objected to such partition. Instead, it put forward the alternative: "One State, Two Nations".
5. While India constantly confirms its secular character, Israel insists on its Jewish status as the homeland of the world Jewry.

Radical transformations in India's policy towards Israel after the cold war

International and regional transformations in the early 1990s reflected on India-Israel relations. Combined, the breakdown of the Soviet Union, outbreak of the Second Gulf War and initiation of a political settlement in the region resulted in an expedited action to



establish full diplomatic relations between New Delhi and Tel Aviv. For the most part, the outcomes of these shifts were in favour of Washington and Tel Aviv. India was prompted to approach the United States and Israel in the hope to play a role in the new system and emerge from its economic crisis. In parallel, India found new benefits and an alternative supply of military needs.

By building full relations between both sides, areas of cooperation have been on an upward trajectory of growth, diversity and expansion, particularly in economic and military aspects. On the other hand, the question of Palestine has no longer been subject to the rule, by which Arab support automatically entailed animosity to, and boycott of, Israel. India has managed to draw a balance between the opposites by adopting a pragmatic approach with all the parties it engaged with.

The fact that India and Israel shared many goals contributed to the convergence and harmony between the two countries. Both had multiple goals and motives to establish full relations across a range of areas. A set of political, economic and strategic causes guided Israel's willingness in the course of its relations with India. Israel insisted to continue to better improve and develop these relations, serving its foreign policy objectives in South Asia, and all over the world at large. Likewise, India was driven by its own interests and goals to build large-scale and growing relations with Israel.

Due to the serious economic crisis which India experienced in the early 1990s, headed by Narasimha Rao, the Indian government launched an economic programme based on the free market economy. For almost 50 years from independence, India had embraced socialist economic policies. Having caused tens of millions of Indians to fall into poverty and unemployment, the economic crisis highlighted India's need to initiate relations with the United States of America, now the superpower that dominated the world order following collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been the main ally of India since the beginning of the cold war.²³

This situation was reflected by many countries, particularly rising powers across the Third World. States in the South Asia region, including China and India, provided a notable example. In these transformations, India saw a favourable opportunity to overcome its crippling economic crisis and find an appropriate alternative to secure needed military supplies after the Soviet Union had broken down. Indeed, New Delhi was not remiss or late to grab this opportunity. It turned to the White House, where Indian Prime Minister Rao announced his decision on launching full diplomatic relations with



Israel on 29 January 1992. According to observers, this decision marked the most important paradigm shift in the course of Indian foreign policy since the end of the cold war. “If charismatic Indian leaders had difficulty taking such a step, how could Rao do it?” Observers wondered.²⁴

An answer to such, and other, questions was provided by a set of key Indian transformations, which demonstrated the beginning of effective rapprochement with Israel. For instance, in December 1991, India suddenly joined the United Nations member states, which voted in favour of repealing the resolution which determined that Zionism was a form of racism and racial discrimination. For Israel, this was a landmark shift in India’s policies towards Israel. By the end of December 1991, Giora Bachar, Israel’s Consul General in Mumbai, was informed that he would be allowed from then on to meet with the Head of Political Division in charge of West Asia at the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This step was tailor made to pave the way for promoting communications between both sides with a view to building full diplomatic relations.²⁵ This remarkable shift in India’s foreign policy towards Israel was driven by a set of internal and external factors, which encouraged India to speed up the establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Commencement of diplomatic exchange between both countries would have not been possible without a combination of internal and external factors. These can be briefly touched on in this context. Internal considerations included economic openness, rise of the Indian right wing movement, security considerations, primacy of interests over the ideological factor, and declining role of the Muslim minority. By contrast, external factors featured the break-up of the Soviet Union, end of the old line of bloc politics and international polarisation, Second Gulf War, transformations in the oil market, PLO approach to a political option, and political settlement.

Based on these internal and external factors, Rao made his decision on full normalisation with Israel, which made rapid strides to open its embassy in New Delhi in February 1992. The Indian embassy was inaugurated in Tel Aviv in May of the same year. This first step towards normalising relations would be ensued by a second phase, where the question of Palestine is no longer subject to rules of the zero-sum game.²⁶ Earlier, Arab support automatically entailed enmity to, and boycott of, Israel. India has managed to draw a balance between the opposites, maintaining its firm position towards the question of Palestine while at the same time consolidating its ties with Israel.²⁷



In a third phase that was launched in the 1990s, India opted for promoting its relations with Israel in various areas. After Atal Bihari Vajpayee became prime minister in 1998, India was more resolute to disclose its unwavering steps towards closer relations with Israel. Along this vein, Vajpayee's approach had the support of opposition parties to the Congress Party. Led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the then newly-formed Indian government gave a significant boost to India-Israel relations as it was ideologically aligned with the ruling right-wing Likud party at the time.²⁸ In this context, Lal Krishna Advani, India's Minister of Home Affairs, visited Israel in 2000. Later, in spite of his bloody record against the Palestinians, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made a historical visit to India in 2003.²⁹

Sharon's visit to India turned a new page in the relations between both states. Over a short span of time, relations deepened and reached an advanced stage. By the end of 2003, the United States-India-Israel axis³⁰ was announced. At this point, obstacles that had stood in the way to full political relations between India and Israel lost some influence. These included India's traditional relation with the Arab world and members of India's Muslim minority, which the Congress Party used to show interest in winning their votes. In addition to a large Indian workforce in the Arabian Gulf states, the Arab and Islamic world was also the main source of power supply for India.

The India-Israel partnership in the context of new pragmatism

Strongly welcomed by Israel, Narendra Modi, Leader of Bharatiya Janata (Indian People's Party), took office as India's Prime Minister. Modi has had great interest in boosting relations with Israel. In his telephone call, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated Modi on his victory in the election and highlighted the solid relations between both countries. Modi was described in glowing terms by Israeli security and political circles: "outgoing"; "assertive"; "extremely, extremely clever"; and "very *tachles*, very direct, very Israeli."³¹

Netanyahu was the first foreign official to congratulate Modi on his victory. "Some of the transformations around the world are extremely positive for us. One of these transformations are the elections results in India. In general, it seems to us that dealing with Asia is better than dealing with Europe."³² Netanyahu stated. On the occasion of the Jewish Passover, Modi tweeted in Hebrew and English: "happy holidays, friends".



Netanyahu responded by tweeting, “Thank you, my friend, for your kind holiday greeting. The people of Israel eagerly await your historic visit.”³³

In their meeting on the margins of the United States General Assembly meetings of September 2014, Netanyahu described the ties with India as close and excellent and that they would deepen in the future. Netanyahu added: “This is an opportunity for Israel and India to expand further our relationship.” Netanyahu also said: “We are two old peoples, some of the oldest in the nations on earth but we are also two democracies, we’re proud of our rich traditions but we’re also eager to seize the future. I believe that if we work together we can do so with benefits to both our peoples. We’re very excited by the prospects of greater and greater ties with India, we think the sky is the limit.”³⁴

Modi told Netanyahu that he agreed that “India-Israel relations are historic. I met this morning with the people from the Jewish community, American Jewish Committee, and they all appreciated that there is a deep recognition in Israel that India is the only country where anti-Semitism has never been allowed to come up, where Jews have never suffered and lived as an integral part of society,”³⁵

There is a close resemblance between both men. While Modi is notoriously racist against the Muslim minority in India, Netanyahu is also hostile to the Arab minority in Israel. Modi and Netanyahu believe in the market economy and have embraced national policies that have aligned their countries to dominantly ethnic-religious states. Both are in confrontation with Islamic nuclear states. Along this vein, India is in conflict with nuclear Pakistan and Israel with the Iranian nuclear programme. Additionally, Modi and Netanyahu think that “Islamic terrorism” is the most dangerous.

In this context, Zalman Shoval, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, expected that Modi’s victory would substantially enhance ties with India. According to Shoval, the most significant denominator that would promote the relations between Tel Aviv and New Delhi under Modi lies in the confrontation against “nuclear Islam”. Shoval added: “Just as India is facing the Pakistani nuclear threat, Israel too is facing the Iranian nuclear threat. This brings about a language of understanding with Modi.”³⁶

In the same month Modi met with Netanyahu, an arms deal worth US\$ 520 million was signed. Accordingly, Israel would supply India with anti-tank missiles. Another agreement on joint manufacturing was signed between India and the Israeli company, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd.³⁷



Since Modi came to power in May 2014, ties between Israel and India have seen a remarkable activity. Both countries signed a series of agreements on defence and technology. In the same month, Modi's government approved a long-awaited purchase of Israeli missiles. Currently, India is the largest customer of Israeli weapons. Following Russia, Israel ranks second in arms exports to India. In the first nine months of 2014, trade between both India and Israel was as much as US\$ 3.4 billion.³⁸

In the same period, Rajnath Singh, a prominent leader in the Bharatiya Janata Party, visited Israel and received assurances from Moshe Ya'alon, Israeli Defence Minister, that Israel was ready and willing to exchange military technology with India.³⁹

Some observers believe that these relations have flourished thanks to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the National People's Party that rose to power in 1998. Guided by an extremist Hindu orientation, the NDA views Israel as a natural ally against Islamic forces around the world. After the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition held office in May 2004, observers thought that things would change and that the relations with Israel would be somewhat frosty. On the contrary, under the new government, India-Israel relations strengthened more than ever before.⁴⁰

Modi always looked forward to building strong political and commercial ties with Israel. As early as 2006, Modi responded to an invitation to visit Israel and take part in a conference on agricultural technology. Modi met with the head of the Indo-Israeli Chamber of Commerce and held meetings with Israeli businesspeople. On his visit to Tel Aviv, Modi promised that he would set a historical precedent and visit the Jewish state once he becomes the Prime Minister of India. That visit laid the foundation for constant relations: In addition to encouraging partnerships with Israel's successive governments, Modi advised departments in his state to study agriculture and water management systems in Israel.⁴¹

Modi's interest in consolidating relations with Tel Aviv was not only based on his ideology, but was also motivated by the legacy of the ties he had built with Israel when was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Then, he believed that Israeli investments played a key role in improving the economic situation in the state of Gujarat, with a GDP reaching as high as 13.4 percent compared to just 7.8 percent of the overall GDP of India.⁴²

During his term, Israeli industries were the focus of Modi's attention. Huge tenders were awarded to Israeli contractors, including a semiconductor factory, a new port, and a water



desalination plant. In Gujarat, Israeli agriculture, pharmaceutical industries, alternative energy, and IT companies prospered.⁴³

Modi represents a new generation of India's policy, which has faith in economic pragmatism. Modi established India's relations with countries around the world along the lines of a policy that aspires for economic growth. This approach is consistent with the deepening of relations with Israel, which has expertise in high-tech, agriculture, telecommunications, and security.⁴⁴

The fact that relations between India and Israel were closer after Modi rose to power was not surprising. Before he held office, Modi had already made many statements, commending Israel and stressing the importance of strengthening relations with it in all aspects. Modi adopted an undisguised policy towards convergence with Israel. During his term of office, India refrained from voting on a resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which condemned the Israeli offensive on Gaza, reflecting a major, unparalleled development in the history of Israel-India relations.⁴⁵

In view of possible resurgence of international polarisation and Western-Russian rivalry, the approach of India's foreign policy was likely to change, prioritising subjective and pragmatic interests at the expense of the non-aligned approach. This approach was tailored to benefit from military, economic and technological cooperation provided by attempts to polarise India. At the external level, Israel is probably the most significant winner thanks to these outcomes. Israel already has strong personal, economic and industrial ties with Modi since he was Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001. Israel has also built distinct relations with the right-wing National People's Party, particularly when it was in power between 1998 and 2004. Most likely, these ties will deepen further in the near future.⁴⁶

According to a study of the Institute for National Security Studies of Tel Aviv University, if it were for Modi's desire alone, it can be assumed that a major shift will be seen in the relations between India and Israel. The fact that Modi came to power in India furnishes a historical opportunity for Israel to improve its international position.⁴⁷

Some Israeli politicians stated that Modi's victory was the most favourable development, which could enhance relations between both states. Likewise, according to some analysts, Modi brings about a "new spirit" that brings about to paradigm shifts in India's foreign policy, positively impacting ties with Israel.⁴⁸ Some observers are also of the view that,



under Modi, India's relations with Israel can shift from a partnership to an unprecedented strategic alliance as both states adopt mutually beneficial policies.⁴⁹

In the same context, Alon Ushpiz, Israeli Ambassador to India, is of the opinion that Israel gained a wider access to India via India's upper eastern state, namely, Gujarat. To do so, Israel relied on two demographic features, in both of which Modi registered an outstanding achievement for the sake of Israel. Firstly, Modi was hostile to Indian Muslims, who garnered support of the question of Palestine across India. Secondly, as Ushpiz put it, there was a Jewish minority, towards whom Modi had a compassionate and generous attitude.⁵⁰

Against this background, India's relations with Israel marked a new and qualitative development after Modi came to power in 2014. In addition to longstanding and distinctive economic relations, after he held office, Modi gave an impetus to the ties between his country and Israel. More recently, India and Israel signed a litany of agreements on defence and technology, further highlighting the flourishing commercial and political relations between the two countries.⁵¹ 2015 and 2016 saw a significant increase in economic exchanges, including high-tech, agriculture, investments and joint ventures, with a particular focus on infrastructure and water management.⁵²

In 2014, an arms deal worth US\$ 144 million was concluded between Israel and India. Accordingly, New Delhi would receive 262 Barak 1 missiles over a span of five years, beginning in December 2015. These would be installed on 14 warships of the Indian Navy.⁵³

On 1 July 2014, Indian Defence Minister Krishna Mathura visited Israel with the aim of speeding up military deals between both sides. These included the high-capacity Swordfish long-range tracking radar, 1-tonne guided air bombs, missiles of various types, and two early-warning radar systems. Additionally, the Indian side tried to place pressure on Israel to accelerate the implementation of an air defence system for the INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier.⁵⁴

In 2015, India expedited plans to purchase Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that could be equipped with weapons, enabling the Indian army to launch airstrikes outside India's territory with minimal risk to Indian troops. According to Indian sources, for three years, New Delhi had been willing to purchase IAI Heron UAVs. However, in January



2015, the Indian army requested the procurement be speeded up when Pakistan and China initiated capacity development, using similar UAVs.⁵⁵

Also in 2015, an agreement was signed to sell 8,000 Spike anti-tank guided missiles, developed and designed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. Israel announced the deal following indications made earlier in November 2014. Then, Indian Minister of Security Affairs, Rajnath Singh, visited Tel Aviv and met with Israeli Defence Minister, Moshe Ya'alon.⁵⁶

In this context, Ya'alon's visit to India in February 2015 marked a turning point, highlighting security and intelligence relations between Israel and India. Ya'alon declared: "We have used to keep our security relations away from the spotlight. Now, I'm here... in Delhi, to meet with Prime Minister Modi and other ministers."⁵⁷ Ya'alon explained that cooperation with India was effected through the exchange of information, utilisation of technology made by both states, and reliance on manufacturing and production in India. He described relations between both sides as deep and strong, stressing that successive Israeli governments should take care of these relations because India and Israel had common values and interests.⁵⁸

Ya'alon's visit was the first by an Israeli Defence Minister to India since diplomatic relations had been established between both countries. Following this visit, Ya'alon issued instructions to scale up cooperation with India. For Israel, India presented a golden opportunity in security and military fields. India's 2015 budget amounted to US\$ 36 billion. Still, Indian military and security industries were not capable of fulfilling India's requirements. Consequently, India will rely more on Tel Aviv to procure weapons and initiate cooperation in many areas.⁵⁹

In 2016, Arup Raha, Chief of the Air Staff of India, visited Tel Aviv and met with Moshe Ya'alon, Israeli Minister of Defence. The Indian Chief of the Army Staff also met with his Israeli counterpart. In his talks with the Israelis, Raha discussed the development of several projects, including Barak 8 air defence systems, as well as others projects for the Indian Air Force and Armoured Corps.⁶⁰ The last arms deal made in 2016 was revealed and described by the Israeli *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper as the largest in the history of relations between both countries. In line with this US\$ 3 billion deal, India would procure 164 laser-guided missiles to be installed on Russian Sukhoi and Yagur fighters. In addition to a variety of military materiel, the arms deals included 250 smart bombs that were capable of destroying fortified positions and other underground sites.⁶¹



Throughout 2016, Israel also continued to strengthen its alliance with India at all military, technological and economic levels. Then, India and Israel celebrated 25 years of diplomatic relations between both countries. In November 2016, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited India – the first to be made by an Israeli president. Rivlin met with Indian Prime Minister Modi, who viewed Rivlin’s visit as further deepening of ties between the two countries, particularly after Indian President visited Israel earlier in 2015.

In his meeting with Rivlin, Modi stated: “We are familiar with Israel’s advances in agriculture, and its expertise in micro-irrigation in drought-prone areas and water management. We both agreed that the current trajectory of the Indian economy opens up many promising opportunities for Israeli companies. Many of India’s flagship programmes like Make in India, Digital India and Smart Cities development, with their “emphasis on innovation, research and technological development, match well with Israel’s strengths and capacities.”⁶²

In 2017, Israel Aerospace Industries announced that arms deals in the amount of US\$ 2 billion had been signed with India. Accordingly, New Delhi would be provided with Barak 8 air and missile defence system. The largest in the history of Israeli security industries, this deal would supply India with all Barak 8 components, including launch pads, missiles, telecommunications, control and surveillance, and radar systems. According to Hebrew sites, the deal was a main topic on the agenda of Rivlin’s visit to India in 2017. It further reflected in-depth cooperation with India, which was both significant and strategic.⁶³

Also in 2017, Indian Prime Minister Modi went on a three-day visit to Israel. In addition to political talks with the Israeli government and opposition leader, Modi held secret talks on improving “anti-terrorism” coordination. Modi also had an emotional encounter with an 11-year-old Jewish boy, who lost his parents in a 2008 attack in Mumbai. Modi addressed the audience of a Bollywood concert organised by Israelis of Indian descent. Modi also visited the so-called Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Centre and tomb of the spiritual father and founder of Zionism, Theodore Herzl.⁶⁴

At the economic level, a US\$ 40 million innovation fund for research and development was established during Modi’s visit to Israel. Seven bilateral agreements were signed in the fields of technology, agriculture, water, and space research. During the launch of the Indo Israel CEOs forum, Netanyahu said: “We’ve agreed the sky isn’t the limit because



we'll do it in the space. But I think that our talents in India and Israel are amazing and capabilities are amazing”.

Modi stated: “India and Israel face the common threat of terrorism.” He added that he could only move his country’s embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem after the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis is settled. On the other hand, the question of Palestine was completely absent from Modi’s talks with Israeli official. In his addresses in Israel. Modi did not even mention the question of Palestine.⁶⁵

India has habitually adopted a cautious diplomacy in the Middle East for fear of upsetting Arab states and Iran. India relies on these countries to secure significant oil exports. New Delhi is also wary of raising discontent of India’s Muslim population minority. While it remains a strong supporter of the question of Palestine in international forums, India seeks to keep its relations with Israel away from the spotlight.

In 2018, Modi visited the Palestinian territory, putting an end to suspicions that India had abandoned its historical support of the question of Palestine for the sake of strengthening growing ties with the State of Israel. India has maintained balanced and traditional relations with the Palestinian and Israeli sides in spite of Modi’s visit to Tel Aviv, which elicited incomprehension as the first to be made by Indian Prime Minister to Israel.

Shortly before Modi’s visit, Advisor to the Palestinian President for Political Affairs, Majdi Khalidi, said that the Palestinian side looked for India’s mediation in the political process in light of the increasingly dwindling American role. According to Khalidi, “Mr. Modi’s visit comes at an extremely important juncture as Palestine needs India to play a more interactive role in the region”. Khalildi went on: “The United States cannot play the mediation role alone”, alluding to the United States decision on recognition of Jerusalem as a unified capital of the State of Israel.” “We call for EU mediation. We also call on India, which can be a pioneering and strong mediator in a multi-polar world, to take part in the political process,” Khalildi concluded.⁶⁶

Although India’s traditional support of the two-state solution was not mentioned in the two joint statements with Netanyahu, the Indian government made clear on many subsequent occasions that it was still in support of this position. In an interview with an Israeli newspaper in 2018, Modi stated that India believed that the two-state solution, by which the Israeli state could live side by side with its Palestinian counterpart, in future peace was feasible. The Indian Prime Minister made a similar statement during the



Palestinian President's visit to India in May 2017. According to analysts, Modi's visit came at a critical time following United States President Donald Trump's decisions, which stirred up worldwide controversy, considering Jerusalem as a unified capital of the State of Israel and suspending aid to Palestine.⁶⁷

The impact of India-Israel partnership on the question of Palestine

I. Political implications

1. Supported by Washington, Israel's rapprochement with India has diminished the Arab political balance on the international stage in general, and in Asia in particular. Historically, India has been the most important country that supported Arab rights, first and foremost the question of Palestine.⁶⁸
2. The Indian position towards Arab issues has changed as a result of developing Israeli-Indian relations. The Indian policy is no longer as it was in the past. Following the break-up of its main ally, namely, the Soviet Union, India began to shift from the ideological to the pragmatic factor. This was particularly the case after India experienced an internal economic crisis in the early 1990s.⁶⁹
3. Israel has reached out to Central Asian republics via India⁷⁰ and thus cordoned off the Arab world. Several scholars highlight two objectives of Israel's infiltration into Central Asia, namely, to:
 - a. Neutralise the Arab and Muslim role in Central Asia and curb the development of joint relations, particularly if these would influence Israel's activity in the region. These can disrupt the military balance to the disadvantage of Israel.
 - b. Stress the importance of Israel's presence in the region from a geographical perspective. Israel views Central Asia as a significant and pivotal region, an extension of the Red Sea, and a zone with a military outlook.⁷¹
4. The United States-India-Israel axis poses a threat to the Arab national security despite the fact that it was mainly established to encircle China, besiege Iran, weaken Pakistan, and unite efforts under the pretext of fighting terror. In light of its relations with Washington and thanks to its military and economic capabilities, Israel can guide this alliance so as to threaten Arab national and regional security.



5. The clash of civilisations between the Arab and Islamic worlds on the one hand, and the West on the other, can be nurtured. As they put it, India and Israel share fears of radical Islamic movements and accuse some Arab states of supporting these movements in neighbouring countries. India and Israel present the conflict as one between Muslims and non-Muslims. Engaging Israel can make the Arabs, wholly or partly, involved in the complexities of the conflict across the Indian Peninsula.⁷²

II. Economic implications

1. Growing Israeli-Indian relations has opened up an opportunity for Israel to gain access to the Arabian Gulf states. Let alone the geographical proximity and overlapping interests, more than seven million Indians work in these states. This means that Israel views India as a back-door way to access the Gulf region, either to market Israeli products or to implement sabotage projects against the Arabs.⁷³
2. Strengthened Israeli-Indian relations with oil-producing Islamic states can trigger pressure on oil-producing Arab countries with the aim of reducing oil prices. This requirement is consistent with India's increasing oil needs in the context of its economic and industrial rise. It is worth noting that decreasing oil and gas prices will minimise influence of the Arab world.⁷⁴
3. India-Israel cooperation can open up the large Indian market to Israeli products, enabling Israel's resilience in the face of Arab and international boycott.⁷⁵
4. Fostering strong relations between India and Israeli will be at the expense of Arab states, which are viewed as consumer markets. These strong ties will allow room for Israel to emerge from isolation, expand Israeli trade, and roll out economic expertise in a boundless vital space.⁷⁶

III. Military and security implications

1. The most dangerous outcome of the India-Israel military cooperation is the agreement made between Tel Aviv and New Delhi to not sign a treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This coordinated policy can give a free hand to and encourage Israel to develop weapons of mass destruction and missile force,



- making it the primary military power in the Middle East. It will also prevent any attempt to denuclearise the region.⁷⁷
2. This multilateral cooperation between India and Israel serves national and security interests of both countries. Should Israel offer intelligence and military assistance to India, that is not without a price, however. Equally, India has to offer what serves Israel's goals in the Arab region. India does have a significant manpower and large-scale economic interests in the Arab region, and this can serve Israeli schemes there.⁷⁸
 3. Israel-Indian relations allow Israel an opportunity to become familiar with some details of the weapons in the hands of Arab countries, and which India also possesses. This can be achieved by development programmes implemented by Israel to the benefit of India, ensuring support of Israel's capability vis-à-vis that of the Arabs, particularly the "front-line states".⁷⁹
 4. Beyond the front-line states, Israel has the strategic depth it lacks to confront external threats at Arab and Islamic levels. Potential use of Indian territory or provision of military facilities allows Israel to launch pre-emptive strikes on vital military targets, which pose a threat to Israel, such as Pakistani and Iranian nuclear installations.⁸⁰
 5. Israel's use of the Indian Ocean in cooperation with the Indian fleet poses an immediate threat to Southeast Arab world, particularly the Arabian Gulf states and Iraq, as well as to Southeast Asia, including Iran and Pakistan.⁸¹

To sum up, confronting negative implications of India-Israel relations requires a unified Arab position to be embraced by the League of Arab States. Such a position will lay the grounds for an Arab-Indian dialogue to remind India of its economic interests with Arab states. Reminiscent of the relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv, the fact that the Arabs turn a blind eye to India-Israel relations renders the Arab national security easily penetrable. Unless there is a consolidated Arab political will that is aware of risks to its regional and national security, nothing will stop India from developing its military and security relations with Israel.

Conclusions and findings



In light of the foregoing descriptive analysis and presentation of the developments and transformations in India's foreign policy, particularly over the past two decades, this investigation concludes the following:

1. Change in Indian foreign policy is a result of internal and external factors, first and foremost the end of the cold war, disintegration of the Soviet Union, and rise of the United States of America as a major power in international relations.
2. India surely supported the question of Palestine for many reasons and justifications. Mainly, the Non-aligned Movement influenced India's foreign policy during the cold war era. India built good relations with Arab states, particularly Egypt and Arabian Gulf states. India also needed Arab energy sources and cash transfers from Indian workers in the Gulf states.
3. During the cold war, India used its continuous support to the Palestinians and Arabs to block any Pakistani propaganda in the Arab world, which would state that India was inimical to Pan-Arabism and Islam. It is worth noting that the bitter Indian-Pakistani conflict took the form of an Islamic-Hindu clash. Hence, the question of Palestine was one bridge used by India to gain access to the vast Arab milieu.
4. Beyond doubt, India saw transformations in the areas of development and foreign policy in the post-cold war era. In this context, Israel used the Oslo Accords of 1993 to exert influence and infiltrate into many Asian states, particularly India and China.
5. Significant internal and external shifts convinced India of the importance of refocusing and formulating its foreign policy priorities. While there was rapprochement with the United States, India established diplomatic ties with Israel, negatively impacting India's engagement with Arab issues in general, and the question of Palestine in particular.
6. Arguably, economic reforms in India during the 1990s, increasing influence of powerful forces of globalisation and free exchange of services and technology have contributed to strengthening relations between India and Israel. It can, thus, be argued that economic interests and considerations were at the expense of ideological principles, which India had upheld for 50 years following its independence.
7. The right wing has risen to power in India, reflected by the extremist national Hindu party. Led by Narendra Modi, the right wing is now in power. This has, too, contributed to promoting relations with Israel. Both the Israeli and the Indian



right-wing parties exploit the so-called platform of “Islamic terrorism” to promote convergence in the face of this global danger.

In sum, it can be postulated that India has built deep relations with Israel at all levels, including in economic, political, military and intelligence fields. Certainly, these ties will reflect on India’s relationship with Palestine and the Arabs, particularly on the medium and long runs. These can also adversely impact the pattern of political support provided by India to the question of Palestine on the international stage given that India is still in support of Palestinian rights in the majority of international and regional organisations. To contain the growing relations with Israel, the Arab world needs to act as a single block in order to bolster ties and diversify aspects of rapprochement with India. Effective Arab initiatives need to be launched to resolve the Indian-Pakistani conflict. Along these lines, Israel exploits the conflict in Kashmir to legalise its growing relations with India.



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