



Israel National Defense College

# India–Israel Relations

Strategic Interests, Politics  
and Diplomatic Pragmatism

*Itzhak Gerberg*



Reuven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy University of Haifa

# India–Israel Relations

## Strategic Interests, Politics and Diplomatic Pragmatism

*Itzhak Gerberg*

Israel National Defense College, IDF

With the partnership of the Reuven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy

University of Haifa

February 2010

Head of Research Center, National Defense College and Holder of the Reuven  
Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy: **Arnon Soffer**

Style Editor: **Murray Rosovsky**

Cartography Editor: **Noga Yoselevich**

Printed by: Israeli National Defense College

<http://geo.haifa.ac.il/~ch-strategy>

© All rights reserved to the Israeli National Defense College IDF.

ISBN 965-7437-17-9

Printed in Israel in February 2010

## **Acknowledgments**

I thank Prof. Arnon Soffer, head of the Israel National Defense College Research Centre, who initiated this monograph; Gil Shalev, chief instructor at the Israel National Defense College, who encouraged me to write it; and the Israel Defense College administration, which made this monograph possible. The views expressed in this monograph are solely mine and should not be attributed to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs or to any other organization.

# Abstract

This monograph concentrates on the relations between India and Israel. The State of Israel, which was established in 1948, was recognized by India on 18 September 1950. However, the two countries established full diplomatic relations only on 29 January 1992.

Indo-Israeli relations from 1948 to 1991 were characterized by a partial pro-Arab and anti-Israeli foreign policy. This stance reflected India's own interest in the Middle East as well as its traditional sympathy with the Arabs; it was further influenced by India's commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the sentiments of Indian Muslims.

In 1992 a significant diplomatic change occurred, when India and Israel established full diplomatic relations.

Successive Indian governments have influenced Indian foreign policy on Israel. Under the governments headed by the BJP (1998-2004) the relations between the two countries reached new heights. Despite the slowdown since 2004, bilateral relations between India and Israel in general and their defense relations in particular have continuously evolved positively, centring on the convergence of the two countries' strategic interests.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	3
<b>Abstract</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	8
<b>THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL IN 1992</b>	9
<b>India-Israel bilateral relations in the international system</b>	11
Military interests	11
Counter-terror interests	12
Intelligence interests	14
Foreign affairs interests	14
Economic interests	16
Geo-strategic interests	17
Nuclear power interests	18
<b>India-Israel multilateral relations in the international system</b>	21
Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement	21
United Nations	22
The United States of America	23
Jewish-American organizations	24
Russia	24
China	26
Central Asia	28
Globalization	29
Muslim World	30
Pakistan	31
Arab World	32
PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)	35
India as an acceptable international player in the Middle East conflict	36
<b>National system as a level of analysis of Indo-Israel relations: politics, society and individuals</b>	37
Traditional pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy of the Congress party	37

Nehruvian tradition of pro-Arab policy	37
India's political approach to Israel	38
The domestic Muslim factor in India	39
Pressure groups	40
Leadership of individuals	42
<b>Key Changing Circumstances</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>INDO-ISRAEL RELATIONS AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1992</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Convergence vs. divergence of strategic interests of India and Israel</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Joint strategic interests</b>	<b>50</b>
Diplomatic relations	50
Defence relations	53
Economic relations	55
Counter-terrorism cooperation	57
Intelligence cooperation	58
Space cooperation	58
<b>Common strategic interests</b>	<b>59</b>
Science and technology cooperation	59
Nuclear power policy coordination	60
USA	61
Russia	62
Geo-strategy	62
Asia	63
Central Asia	64
Pakistan	64
<b>Divergent strategic interests</b>	<b>66</b>
United Nations	66
Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)	67
Energy and oil	68
People's Republic of China (PRC)	69
Iran	70

Islamic world	72
Arab world	73
Palestinian Authority	75
<b>India Israel relations on the level of national system: politics, society, and individuals</b>	82
Indian political system	82
United Front (UF) governments	83
National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments	84
United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governments	85
Pressure groups	85
<b>Conclusion</b>	91
<b>Selected Bibliography</b>	92

## Introduction

The bilateral relations of India and Israel are of great importance to both countries and their national strategic interests. Any meaningful progress in their establishment had been prevented between 1948 and 1992 owing to domestic, regional and international developments related to the Arab-Israel conflict. However, in January 1992, in a surprise diplomatic move, full-fledged diplomatic relations were established between the Republic of India and the State of Israel.

The transformation of Indian policy on Israel and the establishment of the diplomatic relations on 29 January 1992 are considered by India one of the most important steps in Indian diplomacy. The former Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs J. N. Dixit, described it thus:

I consider our establishing relations with South Africa and then with Israel as the most significant among developments in India's foreign policy, which occurred during my period as Foreign Secretary (Dixit 1996).

To comprehend India-Israel relations it is essential to understand the change of the Indian policy towards Israel as a formative event that led to the evolving relationship between the two countries.

After the establishment of diplomatic ties, the relationship became a cornerstone of the two countries' foreign policy, with direct implications for their national security. This was particularly notable under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments in India. In May 2004 a new Indian government, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), was formed by the Congress party headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Relations with Israel thereupon were moderated somewhat. Nevertheless, the relations of the two countries with regard to defence have continued to develop, based on the convergence of their strategic interests.

---

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL IN 1992

On 22 January 1992, the Israeli Consul in Bombay, Giora Becher, was invited to the Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, J. N. Dixit, in New Delhi. The Secretary told him of India's immediate intention to improve its relations with Israel. The Consul replied that Israel was interested only in full-fledged diplomatic relations, and that such a diplomatic move would allow India to participate in the Middle East peace process and in the working groups of the process' multilateral channel in particular. On 29 January 1992 an official announcement was published simultaneously in Jerusalem, New Delhi and Moscow (where the Israeli Foreign Minister, David Levi, was attending the third round of the peace talks) confirming the establishment of the full fledged diplomatic relations between Israel and India. The same day, the Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India sent an officially informed the Consul in Bombay of the Indian announcement:

The governments of India and Israel have decided to establish full diplomatic relations. Embassies will be opened in Tel Aviv and New Delhi. Modalities regarding this arrangement will be worked out through normal diplomatic channels. In pursuance of the above I have been directed to invite your government to open an embassy in New Delhi (Becher 2002).

In March 1992 the provisional office of the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi was opened (at the Meridian Hotel). In July 1992 a new Consul and a Chargé d'Affaires, Itzhak Gerberg<sup>1</sup>, arrived in India and was received warmly. In November 1992 the first Israeli Ambassador, Ephraim Duek, presented his credentials to the President of India as an Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador to India.

In this monograph the strategic interests that influenced the Indian

---

1 The author of this monograph.

government's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel is analysed on three levels: the international system, state and society, and individual leadership. The international system level is further sub-divided into bilateral relations and multilateral relations (Waltz 1959).<sup>2</sup> In addition, changes in circumstances are analysed as determinants regarding the timing of the opening of a window of opportunity and triggering the transformation of Indian policy on Israel.

---

2 As indicated by Kenneth N. Waltz in his book *Man, the State and War* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959).

---

# India-Israel bilateral relations in the international system

## Military interests

During the Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965 and 1971 India acquired a limited quantity of arms and ammunitions from Israel. According to P. R. Kumaraswamy,

The decision by India's Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, in January 1992, to establish full and normal diplomatic relations with Israel was partly influenced by an appreciation of the potential security cooperation between the two countries (Kumaraswamy 1998).

Kumaraswamy added that the arms build-up, modernization of the defence forces and arms export were of national interest to both countries. The emphasis would be on high-quality weapons and military independence. India's considerable problems in upgrading and modernizing its armed forces was a major reason for India to seek military cooperation with Israel.

J. N. Dixit<sup>3</sup> in his memoirs (*My South Block Years*) indicated as one factor in the Indian policy change the fact that "Israel had developed expertise in improving the weapons' systems of Soviet origin, which could be utilized by India" (Dixit 1996). Kumaraswamy also referred to this indirectly:

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the multiplicity of suppliers meant that India had to negotiate with numerous countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.). The fragmentation of the supply system made India extremely vulnerable (Kumaraswamy 1998).

---

3 Former Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, one of the architects of the redirection of Indian policy on Israel and currently the National Security Advisor of the Government of India.

So the unreliability of future arm supplies, especially spare parts, became a major concern of the Indian army after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The USSR had supplied most of the Indian weaponry since the mid-1960s on easy terms and India depended on it for arms and military technology. The Indian military establishment looked forward to possible military cooperation with Israel's military industries to further its search for military technological independence. In fact, even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India had second thoughts about Soviet weapons supplies:

During the 1991 Gulf war Moscow failed to come to assistance of a third world client, it was prepared to stand on the side lines and watched the Iraqi military machine be destroyed. One of the major attractions of receiving weapons from the Soviet Union had been its reliability as a defense supplier, particularly when war had broken out. National security policy makers in Delhi will need to assess the implications of Soviet behaviour in the Gulf war for the other major recipients of Soviet weapons and adjust pattern of sourcing defense supplies accordingly (Thakur 1992).

Another military factor was that the Gulf war had shown that American weapons easily surpassed the Soviet equipment, showing India the latter's inferiority to advanced Western arms. The usefulness of India's indigenous arms production also came into question, especially when adversary states (like Pakistan) might have access to Western weapons (Thomas 1993). Furthermore, since 1991 India had tried to diversify its weapon procurement, and Israel was ready to supply specific advanced types of military equipment and technology not freely available from Western countries, which restricted their arms sales to India (Hewitt 1997).

## **Counter-terror interests**

According to J. N. Dixit,

Israel's knowledge and experience in countering terrorism would be of an immediate relevance to India and dealing with secessionist movements in different parts of the country (Dixit 1996).

---

In 1984, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Indian National Security Guards (NSG) was formed. This was an elite commando unit responsible for the protection of dignitaries. It developed limited—and unconfirmed—cooperation with the Israeli Security Agency (ISA), mostly training courses (Kumaraswamy 1999). Like Israel, India had Muslim minorities, which they feared could be radicalized. India had to deal with the violence in Kashmir, and was fully aware that the Hindu-Muslim rift could encourage radical Islamic fundamentalism in India. The country was concerned about radical Islamic fundamentalism at home, which could encourage domestic terror, extreme secessionist Muslim movements in Kashmir (in 1990 the uprising in Kashmir was at its peak), and possible terror by proxy initiated by Pakistan. India also had to consider the possible takeover of its neighbour Pakistan by radical Islam, and potential implications of this for India's national security. Israel's experience in countering terror was apt and could be of military service to India. Strategically, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism after the Gulf war encouraged similar movements in South Asia and aggravated Hindu-Muslim tension in India (Thomas 1993). On 23 February 1992, less than one month after the Indian announcement on diplomatic relations with Israel, the then Indian Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar, openly stated that normalization paved the way to drawing on Israel's successful experience to curb terrorism. His statement was denied, but three months later Pawar himself, in his new capacity as the Chief Minister of the State of Maharashtra, on direct instructions from Prime Minister Rao, led an Indian delegation to an agricultural exhibition in Tel Aviv; they were accompanied by a high level military team, which visited Israeli military facilities including the Israeli Anti Terror Unit. Stephen P. Cohen (in his book *India – Emerging Power*) maintains that the main reason for the change in Indian policy on Israel was Israel's counter-terror experience: "The dangers from Islamic extremism were so great that it was worth risking domestic Muslim opposition" (Cohen 2001). Ali Khan likewise stated succinctly: "Both countries shared a strategic perception of threat of fundamentalism" (Ali Khan 1992).

## **Intelligence interests**

According to various publications (Kumaraswamy 1998; Naaz 2000; Kapila 2000), cooperation between India's Intelligence Agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and its Israeli counterpart, the Agency for Intelligence and Special Operations (the Mossad), was long-standing. It had begun in the second half of the 1960s, guided by Meir Amit, head of the Mossad from 1964 to 1968. The cooperation was ongoing, not interrupted even during the second premiership of Indira Gandhi, who adopted a staunch anti-Israeli attitude, or at times of other vacillations in India-Israel relations until 1992. However, the establishment of diplomatic relations that year presented a formal structure and opportunities for closer reciprocity in intelligence matters.

## **Foreign affairs interests**

In terms of international law and diplomatic practice, India officially recognized the state of Israel through an exchange of notes between the countries' Ambassadors in Washington on 18 September 1950. Following its independence in 1948, Israel was not a high priority for India's foreign policy. Financial constraints as well as scarcity of personnel obliged India to postpone creating new missions or to make its missions responsible for several neighbouring countries; Israel was one of the countries affected by these measures. The two countries being geographically far apart and no direct conflict or points of military or territorial friction existed between India and Israel. They shared a historical background as ancient civilizations, and Indian had never known any anti-Semitism. The two countries had several similar characteristics, both fought for freedom from the British empire and the struggle eventually led to a creation of democratic states, each headed by the "father" of the nation (David Ben-Gurion and Jawaharlal Nehru). Nehru's concept of India as a secular socialistic parliamentary democracy was similar to Ben-Gurion's idea of Israel as a secular Jewish social democracy.

Another characteristic similar in the two countries is the political link between statehood and religion (although India is constitutionally a secular state and has traditionally opposed the notion that religion should be a basis for nationality). In fact, sharing democratic values, India and Israel were the only democracies in their respective regions.

On the other hand, India initially exploited the Israeli issue in trying to promote its interests with Arab and Islamic countries: it was preoccupied with the Kashmir dispute, and wished to do nothing to upset its local Muslim community. Regional and international developments, as well as political considerations, gradually mounted up to prevent any meaningful diplomatic interaction between the two countries.

A major change, directly affecting India's attitude to Israel, occurred in India's foreign policy in 1991. Raja C. Mohan, in his book *Crossing the Rubicon* points out that India, driven by necessity, abandoned the philosophical premises that had guided its diplomacy for forty years. The resulting new Indian foreign policy proved more suitable for meeting the challenges of the coming century. Mohan highlights five profound changes in Indian foreign policy since the early 1990s, which also had a direct influence on the decision to transform its policy on Israel:

- A shift in national orientation from domestically focused socialism to capitalism.
- Redirection of the economy: liberalization with the emphasis on trade and foreign investment, which replaced the begging bowl as a symbol of Indian diplomacy.
- Abandonment of India's forty-year love affair with the Third World, symbolized by its obsession with Non-Alignment and its leadership in that movement. India became more interested in participating in directing the international system, rather than remaining merely a

discontented leader of the Third World “trade union”. The national self-interest became the driving force behind Indian diplomacy.

- Rejection of instinctive anti-Westernism, which for four decades had dominated Indian thinking on the global order.
- Replacement of India’s idealistic bent by a new hard-headed, bottom-line pragmatism (Mohan 2003).

Israel, for its part, hoped that in addition to its gain from diplomatic relations with India, this development would encourage other countries in Asia in general and Asian Muslim countries in particular to establish diplomatic relations with it.

## **Economic interests**

The opportunity for trade, technology transfer and investments from Israel had an important impact on the change in Indian policy on Israel—particularly because by 1991 India’s economy had been on the brink of collapse. Dixit referred on two different occasions to the importance of the economic variable in the Indian decision to establish relations with Israel. First he wrote: “There was, of course, the prospect of beneficial economic and technological equations” (Dixit, 11 December 1997). He was more specific in his memoirs:

Israelis were interested in establishing economic relations with India and were willing to invest here. They also wanted to initiate scientific and technological cooperation with us. Israel’s agricultural experiences in dry farming, desert irrigation, agro-industries and agricultural cooperatives could prove beneficial to India (Dixit 1996).

Ali Khan wrote: “India could set the ball rolling for transfer of technology for agricultural and other purposes” (Ali Khan 1992). On the more local level, Indian businessmen and companies, such as Indian diamond dealers

---

in Tel Aviv and the Hinduja Brothers' company in Bombay, tried to be instrumental in promoting diplomatic relations between India and Israel, although their influence was limited.

## **Geo-strategic interests**

As described by Dixit, India's geo-strategic interest was of much importance in its attitude to Israel:

The importance to India of the region from the Gulf to Israel and Turkey cannot be ignored... Arab sea lanes and air space are of vital economic and strategic interest (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997).

Israel was strategically located on the Northern or North-Eastern flank of number of Muslim countries, which encouraged Islamic religious fanaticism in the Central Asian and South Asian region ...Arab and other Muslim countries in West Asia and Maghrab could pose a geo-strategic threat to Indian security if they adopted hostile attitudes toward India's initiating full fledged political connections with Israel... (Dixit 1996).

Dixit, like other specialists, was referring to some strategic choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and Bab El Mandeb (the strait at the entrance to the Red Sea).

### ***Energy and oil***

Ali Khan considered Gulf oil as one of the main factors keeping India away from Israel: "Being not self sufficient in energy resources (India) was dependent on the region for oil" (Ali Khan 1992). A similar explanation was given by Dixit: "The Gulf countries and Iran are vital sources of oil and petroleum products for India" (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997). In his memoirs Dixit notes that the oil factor was an issue particularly scrutinized in the Ministry of External Affairs before it submitted its recommendation for a policy change to Prime Minister Rao: "Establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel could have an adverse impact on oil supply from the Gulf

to India" (Dixit 1996). In fact, declining oil prices after the Gulf war played a positive role in Indian considerations regarding Israel. Oil production in the first half of 1990 was high and prices fell (to only \$14 a barrel in June 1990). In August that year Iraq invaded Kuwait and an international embargo was placed upon Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil. The price jumped to \$23 a barrel. After OPEC agreed to increase its production oil prices, which reached \$40 a barrel in early October, fell to \$25 a barrel. In the first quarter of 1991 the price was \$19 a barrel, falling to \$17.5 in the second quarter and to \$16 a year later (Rivlin 2000). The low prices contributed directly to the Indian policy change towards Israel.

### *Indian Ocean*

India and Israel alike have a strategic interest in the Indian Ocean, historically an area of international competition for military, geo-strategic, political and economic advantage. India, obviously because of its location, was an important actor in the Indian Ocean and had a vital national interest in the region. Early on, Israel developed a growing interest in the Indian Ocean: it was the only maritime route to Asia, but also the only way for aviation as Israeli aircraft could not fly over Arab countries in the Middle East on their way anywhere in Asia, South Asia in particular. Secondly, the Indian Ocean could potentially provide Israel with strategic naval depth, which because of its small geographical size it lacked, especially after the downgrading of its relations with South Africa (Kapila 2003).

### **Nuclear power interests**

The Indian Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was created shortly after independence and India embarked on an extensive program of civilian nuclear research, which also had room for a military project (Cohen 2001). From 1968 India was requested by the superpowers to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but despite traditional Gandhian non-violence and Nehruvian international moral precepts, India did not comply with the

---

treaty. The treaty, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1968, sanctioned the use of nuclear technology for civilian purposes under the international supervision of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEC). India developed a concept of what Indian diplomacy called discriminatory international nuclear dread and declined to join the NPT. This was because the treaty made no specified provision for collective security against a non-nuclear state threatened by states already in possession of nuclear weapons and in fact, it restricted the sovereign rights of non-nuclear states to defend their national security. The context was India's consciousness of China's nuclear capacity.<sup>4</sup> Instead, India adopted a non-weaponized deterrence, called recessed deterrence:

An undeclared nuclear weapon, whether assembled or not, provided a security umbrella in the unlikely case that another power threatened India with nuclear weapon (Cohen 2001).

In the 1980s India was watching closely the Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor. As described by P. R. Kumaraswamy,

The Indian security establishment was following closely Israeli military successes such as the bombing of the Osiraq Nuclear Reactor near Baghdad in 1981 (Kumaraswamy 1998).

An unpleasant international development occurred in the 1980s when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's action plan, suggesting phased global and regional nuclear disarmament, received a cool response by the nuclear states. Between 1987 and 1990 Pakistan was clandestinely acquiring nuclear capability; India also faced the Chinese nuclear threat. This was also the time when India and Pakistan refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The weaponization of nuclear devices, based on India's recessed deterrence,

---

4 At that time there was also international speculation that India had some ulterior motive in refusing to sign the treaty: its desire to join the nuclear club. In 1974 India conducted its first nuclear test, which reinforced this speculation and led to international condemnation.

was a limited strategy; it also lacked the weapons that could be safely and reliably used. It was a long-term option, which did not address the more immediate and growing nuclear threat from across India's borders. Note too that in the early 1990s Pakistan was convinced that India was working on a sophisticated process of inertial confinement fusion in order to produce and develop nuclear weapons, including a hydrogen bomb. Israel was concerned that Pakistan would in return develop a nuclear device of its own, which could later be transferred to extremist Arab countries; therefore, intelligence collaboration between Israel and India could be of a benefit to both. At that time, in 1991, the international media speculated about Indo-Israeli nuclear cooperation, but in fact no such collaboration existed as Israel was suspicious about India's suspected nuclear collaboration with Iran.<sup>5</sup> Still, there was room for a different type of indirect complementary cooperation. The two countries perceived their non-conventional ambitions regarding nuclear weapons, missiles and satellites, as an integral part of their national security and a tool for furthering national interests as well as technological independence (Barnaby 1995). With the start of the Indian integrated missile program in 1983, India began the development of an indigenous missile system, which could be assisted by Israeli know-how and technology. At the same time, Israel had an interest in Indian satellite production, ongoing since the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Recall that India and Israel adopted a similar position on various arms control issues such as the NPT and the CTBT, since both were non-signatories to the treaties; however, Israel eventually signed the CTBT in 1996.

---

5 In 1991 the question of "Islamic bomb" built by Pakistan was less relevant than at the end of that decade, as Pakistan conducted its first nuclear test in May 1998. Pakistan, like India and Israel, did not sign the NPT or the CTBT.

6 India's satellite production was made up of a mobile short range missile (Paritvi) and intermediate rang missile (Agni).

# India-Israel multilateral relations in the international system

## Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement

India was a founding member and a prominent leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).<sup>7</sup> The organization provided India with the opportunity to formulate the stance of the developing countries at the United Nations and in the international arena (particularly during the tenures of Nehru and Indira Gandhi). On several occasions India utilized NAM as an alternative to the UN to underline New Delhi's independence as well as to reaffirm the importance of Third World solidarity and India's role in leading it. Moreover, the ideas of Non-Alignment and Third World solidarity had been one of the main manifestations of the Sino-Indian rivalry. India's early attitude to Israel had harmonized with Cold War politics, and Israel's identification with the West had provided an ideological basis for India's pro-Arab orientation: the Arab League and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were observers in NAM. The end of the Cold War marked a weakening of the movement, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 it was forced to reassess the rationale for its continued existence. According to Vernon Hewitt, the NAM summit of 1989 was already marked by a new sense of realism (Hewitt 1997). Since Israel's exclusion from the Bandung conference, NAM had emerged as the principal forum seeking Israel's international isolation. The ending of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union along with the paradigm of a bipolar world, the emergence of the USA as the sole superpower, America's enhanced global importance, and the improvement

---

7 The Non-Aligned Movement was established in Belgrade in 1961 and agreement was reached on a triennial conference. The early ascendancy of the leaders of the organization and the real foundation of NAM was at the Bandung conference in Indonesia in 1955. The Belgrade declaration called upon the superpowers to preserve and protect international peace, demanded freedom for all colonial people, condemned racism and appealed for complete disarmament.

of relations between Washington and Beijing all eroded the very concept of NAM and made it internationally irrelevant. This exerted a direct influence on the change of the Indian attitude to Israel in 1992.

## **United Nations**

India had played a leading role at the United Nations since independence. It was an active member of various UN forums and participated in some UN peacekeeping mission worldwide; one of these was active along the Egypt-Israel border before the Six Days War. India's commitment to the UN was ideologically but also politically oriented, underscored by political realism in particular regarding Pakistan and the problem of Kashmir. Nehru's legacy (espousal of international equality and international law) caused India's political elite as well as the Congress party to remain sensitive to UN opinion. Traditionally, however, at the UN Security Council India relied on the Soviet veto to shield it from international condemnation. Generally Kashmir was the issue, raised year after year by Pakistan, which envisaged a role for the UN in imposing a solution. In return for the Soviet veto India invariably voted at the world body in unison with the USSR. With the collapse of the latter India could no longer be assured of a Russian veto when necessary, and it feared censure in the UN over Kashmir. During the 1990s the UN role became transformed, seeming set to grow more robust, while India's input seemed to decline (Hewitt 1997). Nevertheless, in 1991 India was elected for a two-year term on the Security Council (its sixth since independence). India was constantly claiming that it was the second most populous country in the world, and a potentially industrialized country and therefore sought a permanent seat on the Security Council.

At that time India showed willingness to assume an active role in the Israeli-Arab peace process. The first sign was its vote in favour of repealing of the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism with racism. On 17 December 1991 the UN General Assembly voted (111-25) to revoke the 16-year-old anti-Israeli resolution. In supporting the revocation India stressed that it would

---

remove an obstacle in the path to peace in the Middle East and clear the way for a more active role for the UN in the peace process (Ali Khan 1992). Moreover, India concluded that in the absence of diplomatic relations with Israel it could not be a fully active player in UN activity in general and the Middle East peace process in particular.

## **The United States of America**

The break-up of the USSR, India's most important source of defence materiel, deprived it of a major export market and left it more vulnerable to hostile resolutions at the United Nations. It also introduced fresh instabilities, introduced new competitors for foreign aid and above all made links with the West more attractive, especially with the USA. In 1991, after the Gulf war, that country, whose relations with India had been troubled almost since independence, stood solitary and triumphant. In the new world array it was better placed to assist India in its economic reforms and liberalization as India needed American capital and technology. The Gulf war was another factor that showed that when Washington and Moscow found common ground New Delhi must either go along or risk being isolated. The Gulf war proved as well that the USA could mobilize impressive diplomatic resources while being an unchallengeable economic and military super power (Thakur 1992/93). In fact, the international setup after the Soviet break-up and the Gulf war presented India with an entirely new kind of challenge. The USA as a major power bestrode its vital oil supplies, while India's own quasi superpower ally, the Soviet Union, was gone and America evinced but little interest in a reformed relationship with New Delhi (Cohen 2001). After the 1991 general election in India the Rao government concluded that a major improvement in Indo-American relations was essential, and Israel could be a bridge-building factor here, particularly through the assistance of and collaboration with Jewish organizations in the USA and the Jewish-American lobby. Kumaraswamy put it thus:

Having opened up the economy, he [Rao] looked to the West to become his

prime partner for economic development. The lack of relations with Israel, however, precluded a better understanding with industrialized countries, especially with the United States. Since 1947, Washington had been nudging India to modify its foreign policy towards Israel (Kumaraswamy 2002).

Ephraim Inbar expressed a similar view: “Definitely New Delhi believed that upgrading its relations with Israel would have a positive effect on the United States” (Inbar 2004).

## **Jewish-American organizations**

Indian officials, including Prime Minister Narasimha Rao himself, realized that the influential Jewish-American community and the Jewish lobby in the USA could be of help in India's building economic relations with that country (as well as fostering bilateral Indo-US relations). As described by Mohammed Ali Khan, “Normal relations with Israel could help turn pro-Israeli lobbies in the US to show at least a modicum of leaning towards India” (Ali Khan 1992). The power of the Jewish-American Lobby was not overlooked by Prime Minister Rao, in particular considering that in 1991 Rao's government applied to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for urgent support, and the Jewish Lobby in the USA could be instrumental in the approval of such a request; or it could be an obstacle, as it had been four years earlier in respect of support by the US Congress for India. Then, in May 1987, the Anti-Defamation League had protested when Israeli tennis players were not allowed to enter the Davis Cup tournament in New Delhi; American support was reduced from \$60 million to \$35 million. Moreover, India was obliged to allow the Israeli players to play in the tournament.

## **Russia**

According to Stephen P. Cohen, India's non-alignment was an historical pretext for close relations with the Soviet Union. But later India became

---

heavily dependent on Moscow for military supplies as well as international support. Israel, on the other hand, was considered an important part of the American orbit and of the containment strategy of the USA and its allies. According to Cohen,

The Cold War brought in the United States to South Asia – ultimately as an ally of Pakistan – and Indian diplomacy has struggled ever since to establish itself in the Middle East (Cohen 2001).

Surprisingly, J. N. Dixit in his memoirs does not ascribe much importance to the Soviet collapse as impacting the transformation of India's position on Israel. But indirectly he mentions Soviet backing of negotiations between Israel and the PLO as a reference point. He also points out: "Israel had developed expertise in improving the weapon system of Soviet origin, which could be utilized by India" (Dixit 1996). In an article published a year later he indicated that on the macro level the end of the Cold War was one of the factors that impelled India to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, but there was still no direct indication as to how it influenced the transformation of India's policy regarding Israel (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997). It is inconceivable that as former External Affairs Secretary of India he was unaware of the strategic relations between India and the Soviet Union, and the influence of the latter's collapse on Indian foreign policy. Dixit's passing reference to the relevance of that collapse for the change in Indian policy on Israel can be partly explained in that in 1996, when his memoirs were published, the Soviet downfall was a historical fait accompli. In the early 1980s India felt that it had lost its military edge in its own region, and the USSR provided India with massive supplies of modern weapons, making it the world's largest arms importer. After the first Gulf war India realized that the USSR, and later Russia, had not opposed the war and indeed terminated its support for Iraq, which, like India, was equipped with Soviet weapons (Cohen 2001). On the other hand this could explain Dixit's direct reference to Israel's expertise with Soviet weapons, which could be utilized by India. Until the communist collapse Indo-Soviet

relations prospered mainly because of the need for a balance against the West, shared security and geopolitical concerns; these interests coincided with the anti-Israeli foreign policy of both parties. Ali Khan considered the Soviet collapse and the USA's emergence as the sole superpower an important factor that propelled the Indian change of heart regarding Israel. According to him, India's close relations with the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War restricted its freedom of operation and were one of the reasons that kept India away from Israel (Ali Khan 1992). By 1991, gone was New Delhi's closest friend and ally; now, solitary and triumphant, was a single superpower, the United States, a close ally of Israel. India also watched very closely the growing rapprochement between the Soviet Union, and later the new Russian Federation, with the state of Israel, reaching a new peak on 28-29 January 1992, when the third round of the Middle East peace process was hosted in Moscow.

## **China**

The Non-Aligned Movement was an important factor for an understanding of India's relations with China since traditionally the concept of non-alignment was a major reason for the rivalry between the two countries; many Indian analysts considered China India's primary rival. China was connected to India's security environment because of an unresolved border dispute. There was obvious military asymmetry between India and China, which was particularly relevant regarding nuclear capabilities. As for China's relations with Israel, it closely developed this bilateral relationship, emphasizing military procurement and technology transfer. China's acquisition of Israeli hi-tech military equipment was of strategic concern to India and it kept a close eye on the warming Chinese-Israeli relations since the 1980s. Though India's relations with China improved with the passing years, the fundamental issues of concern and friction remained, and China continued to be a major security threat for India. India's long-term plan was to meet China's strategic challenge in the region, and develop military deterrence

---

against Chinese nuclear weapons and missile systems. China, on the other hand, engaged in efforts to create a ring of anti-Indian influence around India through military and economic assistance programs for neighbouring countries, combined with diplomacy. India was concerned about the close military relations between China and Pakistan and considered this situation part of its security dilemma. India also traditionally supported Tibetan claims for a greater autonomy from China.<sup>8</sup> The two countries also competed for foreign investments and markets for their products. In 1991 China was beginning to thrive after over a decade of economic reform. It deemed itself economically and technologically ahead of India, and with its permanent membership of the UN Security Council and nuclear power status, a more important player in the international arena. China embarked on the consolidation and development of its military capabilities. According to Indian strategic researchers, China's foreign and defence policy initiatives were designed to marginalize India in the long term and to reduce it to the status of a sub-regional power by increasing Chinese influence and leverage in the southern Asian region. The gap between India and China in overall military potential, particularly in strategic weapons, widened rapidly in China's favour. Another factor of concern for India was the stationing of Chinese nuclear missiles in Tibet; a border conflict between the two countries could not be ruled out. India feared that militarily strong China might attempt to force a military solution to the long-standing territorial dispute. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister since Nehru, did not advance the border negotiations between the two countries. China wished to enlarge its sphere of influence to Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal. Its growing power and influence in Asia was a strategic challenge for India (Kanwal 1999). In India's strategic calculations vis-à-vis China, Israel was a player that had to be reckoned with considering the important role that Israel could play as a supplier of sophisticated military equipment (to both parties). India was

---

8 The exiled Dalai Lama lives in Dharamsala in North India (although India has not granted him the status of government-in-exile).

also greatly concerned that Israeli military equipment, procured by China, would find its way to Pakistan.

## **Central Asia**

The Central Asian area is strategically located between Russia, China, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran. In geographical terms Central Asia is India's backyard, with which it traditionally maintained historical and economic ties, as well as cultural links. The area was rich in oil and gas. The emergence of the five Central Asian republics on the ruins of the former Soviet Union created a series of opportunities, as well as dangers. In the 1990s the Central Asian republics were multi-ethnic states with a political link between statehood and religion. Their leaders tried to set up official Islamic institutions and made references to Islam as the need arose. Both India and Israel feared the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Central Asian republics after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. India was also apprehensive of possible regional disorder, with degeneration into widespread violence and warring factions. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan joined the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) while Uzbekistan joined the Non-Aligned Movement. New Delhi was increasingly aware of involvement of Uzbeks and Tajiks in the Kashmir area. Israel and India had a common national interest to counter such an Islamic threat from Central Asia. Both countries could not ignore the possibility that the newly born Central Asian states as well as Pakistan might be taken over by radical Islamic rule, with all the perilous strategic implications of such an event for their international interests. There was also a direct linkage between any military developments in the Middle East, the South Asian balance of power and Central Asia. India feared that Pakistan might move quickly to assert itself with the new independent states, utilizing them for Pakistani strategic depth in general and in respect of Kashmir in particular. India was concerned about Islamic extremist elements flowing from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran to Central Asia thence to Kashmir. A reduction in the number of fundamentalist Islamic

militants in the whole region was therefore an Indian, as well as an Israeli, national interest. Dixit wrote:

Israel was strategically located on the northern or northwestern flank of a number of Muslim countries which encouraged Islamic religious fanaticism in the Central Asian and South Asian region (Dixit 1996).

Central Asian stability, in fact, was a common national interest of both countries. Islamic extremism in general, and that in Central Asia in particular, constituted a security challenge to India and Israel. Both countries also found a mutual interest in the new Central Asian republics' Western orientation in their economy, opening the door to joint Indo-Israeli ventures and economic operations.

## **Globalization**

According to Samuel Huntington, globalization led to greater quest for cosmopolitan opportunities in foreign policy (Huntington 2004). This was especially true of India in 1991. The economic liberalization initiated by Prime Minister Rao opened up the Indian economy to the West and globalization. Israel, as a modern technology-oriented state, was an important player in the new global orientation. Dixit referred to the importance of globalization by writing that the global orientation towards non-compartmentalized and harmonious relations between countries was also one of the key factors, at a macro level, that impelled India to establish diplomatic relations with Israel (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997). India realized that the traditional methods of engaging the world were no longer tenable. Driven by necessity, India had to find new ways of doing business with the world; it began to display inventiveness unparalleled in the annals of Indian diplomacy. At first haltingly, then more wholeheartedly, New Delhi during the 1990s abandoned the philosophical premises that had guided Indian diplomacy for forty years and transformed the country's approach to global affairs (Mohan 2003).

## Muslim World

The historical, economic, and cultural relations with the Muslim world emanated from Indian history. Historically, India had been ever the target of invasions and conquests originating in Central Asia. The raiders were Muslim forces such as various Persian groups at different periods; the Mongols; and successive waves of primarily Turkish attackers from Central Asia (including Afghanistan), which progressively conquered most of the north of India. The invasions were a factor of the expansion of Islam which engulfed most of the Middle East and North Africa. In time Muslim kingdoms were established in much of northern India, bringing with them Islamic (especially Persian) culture. Alien Muslim vigour blended with older strands of Indian fabric. Trade with the Muslim countries, conducted by Indian as well as Arab traders, followed the Muslim conquest.

In 1969 India was invited to attend the summit of Islamic states in Rabat (Morocco), but in face of Pakistan's protests and its threat to withdraw from the summit Saudi Arabia, cancelled India's invitation. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was founded in 1971. Traditionally the OIC was critical of India's international politics, in particular regarding Kashmir. As described by Cohen,

The organization of Islamic conference has been critical of India's policies in Kashmir, and a number of West Asian and Gulf states allowed their citizens to fight in Kashmir as part of a pan-Islamic jihadist movement (Cohen 2001).

In 1991 a conference of the Foreign Ministers of the OIC member-states in Karachi set up a fact finding mission and proposed that it be sent to Jammu and Kashmir to report on the situation there. India's refusal to allow the mission into the country earned it condemnation by the OIC summit conference for violation of human rights in Jammu and Kashmir; this encouraged Pakistan to engage an a more active Islamic anti-Indian foreign policy. The OIC consistently supported Pakistan against India

---

over the Kashmir issue. India's frustration with the Arab countries was described by Dixit at a briefing with Arab ambassadors to New Delhi (after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel). In his memoirs Dixit says that he decided to take the bull by its horns. He told the assembled envoys that "India had not received any reciprocity on the Kashmir issue despite our long standing support to several Islamic countries" (Dixit 1996). He even went a step further:

Close relations with Israel could counter moves by those Muslim countries which were inclined to act against Indian interest if instigated by Pakistan (Dixit 1996).

Kumaraswamy pointed out that once the Arab states and the PLO embarked on negotiations with Israel, there was no compelling reason for India to keep to its existing policy on Israel, even though the factors that had prevented India from establishing diplomatic ties in the 1950s – concern about Arab support for Pakistan and apprehension over domestic Muslim sentiments – were still relevant in 1992 (Kumaraswamy 2002).

## **Pakistan**

The creation of Pakistan placed beside India a powerful Islamic rival in southern Asia, competing for the same influence and resources. Thereafter India struggled to establish itself in the Middle East (Cohen 2001). Since independence, India was concerned about Arab support for Pakistan and one of the ways of tackling it was total support of the Palestinian cause. In fact, from the start Indian foreign policy in general, and at the UN in particular, was formulated through the prism of the Indo-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. Over the years Pakistan pursued an active Islamic foreign policy that brought international and financial dividends. Islamabad had long seen itself as a western Asian power, and maintained military and strategic ties with several Middle Eastern and Gulf powers (Cohen 2001). Through the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Pakistan expected, in addition to material and financial help, Muslim diplomatic

support against India over Kashmir. India was worried that arms sales to Arab countries in the Middle East would be diverted to Pakistan. In 1991 India was also concerned that Pakistan was believed to have crossed a nuclear threshold while supporting the insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Another concern of India was that Israeli military equipment sold to China would find its way to Pakistan. By then, India had come to realize that the price it paid to keep the Arab world as neutral as possible in its conflict with Pakistan and the Kashmir issue was too high.

Both countries, Israel and India, also feared that the Kashmir issue and the Palestinian conflict could destabilize their region in a way that would attract unwanted external intervention (Inbar 2004).

## **Arab World**

Since independence India considered its relations with the Arab world a primary national interest, and was ready to pay the price of adopting a consistently hostile position on Israel. According to Kumaraswamy, India thereby became a prisoner of its own rhetoric. Its steady backing of the Arab (and Islamic) countries, especially regarding Israel, was not met with reciprocal support from the Arab and Islamic world. India was unable or unwilling to seek and secure a quid pro quo for its pro-Arab policy. Even when some Middle Eastern countries provided political and occasionally military support for Pakistan, India did not react (Kumaraswamy 2002).

India attached great importance to the Arab countries, which had long enjoyed historical connections and cultural affinities with India (Dixit 1997). As Dixit notes, the Arab countries were a key factor in the decision on the redirection of Indian policy towards Israel:

Our missions in the Gulf conveyed the assessment that the Israeli–P.L.O. contact had the endorsements of important Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E.<sup>9</sup> and Kuwait (Dixit 1996).

---

9 United Arab Emirates.

---

Elsewhere he points out:

The reverse side of the coin entailed the applications that India's long standing friendship and cooperative relations with the Arab countries would suffer if we would establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The Arab and other Muslim countries in West Asia<sup>10</sup> and Maghrab could pose a geo-strategic threat to Indian security if they adopted hostile attitude towards India's initiating full-fledged political connections with Israel (Dixit 1996).

New Delhi was particularly concerned that arms sales to the Middle Eastern Arab countries would be diverted to Pakistan; India accordingly sought close bilateral ties with Iraq and Syria, as well as with its traditional friend, Egypt (Hewitt 1997). The Indian decision was finally made in favour of establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel:

Keeping in view the international power equations and overarching clout of the U.S. with the majority of Arab and Muslim countries the assumption that establishing relations with Israel would result in India's relations with Arab and Muslim countries going into an irretrievable spin was not logical (Dixit 1996).

The Arab world, the Palestinians in particular, was a key variable in the Indian decision to establish full-fledged diplomatic relations with Israel. After consideration of all the variables oriented to the Arab world, the Indian assumption was that no adverse reaction from there would be sparked. Dixit wrote succinctly:

Arab countries themselves had close relations with the U.S. despite its closeness to Israel, so their placing a ban on India in this respect was not logical (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997).

On the other hand, when Dixit briefed Arab and Muslim ambassadors, in the first week of February 1992, after the Indian decision to establish

---

10 West Asia is common terminology for the Middle-East

diplomatic relation with Israel, he told them that

There was no change in India's politics on the Palestinian question or on the importance that we attached to nurturing close friendship with Arab countries (Dixit 1996).

A similar message was delivered by Indian ambassadors to Arab and Islamic countries on the instructions of Prime Minister Rao. By 1991 India had concluded, as Dixit stated, that the political price paid to the Arabs was too high:

A subconscious factor was the Indian feeling that despite its unqualified commitments to Palestinians aspirations and support of Arab causes there was no Arab reciprocity on Kashmir and Pakistan (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997).

The Arab world emerged from the Gulf war divided; the price of oil had plummeted; the international status of the PLO, and of its leader Yasser Arafat, who supported the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, had hit bottom. Dixit neatly sums up the transformed circumstances thus: "In the post Gulf war international situation, India considered it advisable to establish diplomatic relations with Israel" (Dixit 1996).

The important economic factor exerted its own influence on India's relations with Israel and with the Arabs. The Gulf countries (including Iran) were vital sources of its oil and petroleum products. Large numbers of Indians were employed in the Arab countries, a factor that contributed to the Indian foreign exchange reserve. As described by Dixit, establishing diplomatic relations with Israel

could have an adverse impact on the oil supplies from the Gulf to India and might also result in the repatriation of large numbers of Indians working in the Gulf and other Muslim countries who are contributing to India's economic resources as well as foreign exchange reserves (Dixit 1996).

---

## PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)

Before initiating any diplomatic move towards Israel Prime Minister Rao insisted on discussions with Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, to gauge his reaction. He had an official invitation conveyed to Arafat, who visited New Delhi from 20 to 22 January 2001. According to Dixit, in detailed discussions Arafat briefed Rao on the confidential discussions held with the Israeli authorities, and told him that

There was a likelihood of official relations being established between them [the PLO and Israel] in a period of about six to eight months. He agreed with the Government of India's intentions to establish relations with Israel and added that, in fact, India having full-fledged relations with Israel would result in the PLO having a trusted friend as India as an interlocutor between his organization and Israel (Dixit 1996).

When relations with Israel were discussed in the Indian cabinet (on 23 January 2001, the day after Arafat's visit in New Delhi), Prime Minister Rao rounded off the discussion, as described by Dixit, "By advancing the clinching argument that Arafat himself was supportive of India's decisions to open up contacts with Israel" (Dixit 1996). According to Ali Khan, the PLO Chairman's statement following his visit to India was particularly significant for the Indian government and made India feel that there would not be an adverse reaction in the Arab ranks. Arafat's statement indicated that "Exchange of Ambassadors and recognition are acts of sovereignty" (Ali Khan 1992). A similar attitude was expressed by Kumaraswamy:

The willingness of the Arabs and Palestinians to seek a political settlement through direct negotiations altered the rules of Arab-Israeli conflict. Once the Arabs and P.L.O. embarked upon negotiations with Israel there was no compelling reason for India to maintain the status quo. Moreover, Palestinian support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during the Kuwait crisis significantly undermined the Palestinian position. During his visit to India, shortly before normalization, Palestinian leader Yasser

Arafat became reconciled to India's New approach to the Middle East (Kumaraswamy 2002)

Another aspect of the effect of possible diplomatic relations was pointed out by Prime Minister Rao: "India would play a constructive, even-handed role in the peace process"; according to Ali Khan, contacts between India and Israel would have an influence on Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, making it more accommodating of Palestinian aspirations (Ali Khan 1992). The government of India also emphasized, wherever possible, that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel would not change its support for the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people (Dixit 1996).

## **India as an acceptable international player in the Middle East conflict**

According to Ali Khan, India's consistently pro-Arab policy, especially its pro-Palestinian orientation in the international community, robbed India of an opportunity to play a role in the Middle East (Ali Khan 1992). Moshe Yegar, former Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, agreed:

Participation in [the Madrid] conference became a matter of national prestige for some countries; Israel made it quite clear that countries who refused to have normal diplomatic relations with her while having such relations with the Arab countries would be barred from the Madrid conference. It seemed that the Ministry of External Affairs of India did not like the idea of staying out, especially when the PRC,<sup>11</sup> Russia, the United States, and even Syria would be in (Yegar 1999).

---

11 People Republic of China

---

## **National system as a level of analysis of Indo–Israel relations: politics, society and individuals**

### **Traditional pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy of the Congress party**

The traditional Indian pro-Arab policy has its roots in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the mid-1980s the ruling Congress party's attempts to use both Hindu and Muslim formulations to win political loyalty merely served to divide Indian society. The inability of the Congress party leadership to take a decisive stance against communal forces lost it the support of many minority voters in the 1989s elections, particularly the Muslims. In 1989 Rajiv Gandhi's government dithered between its fear of offending the Hindus and its fear of losing the Muslim vote; the result was a political impasse in which the Hindu parties took the initiative. The Congress party establishment continued to insist on a national consensus in foreign policy, and support for the Palestinians and opposition to Israel were part of the progressive orientation of the ruling Congress party. The pro-Arab foreign policy not only became a party consensus but also became an integral part of the Congress party ethos. Prolonged Congress party rule created generations of politicians and bureaucrats committed to Nehruism, its pro-Arab ideology in particular. This indeed continued up to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, and even after. As described by Kumaraswamy, normalization and diplomatic relations with Israel were seen as a betrayal, or a hasty or unprincipled move, and were even portrayed as an anti-Muslim alliance (Kumaraswamy 2002).

### **Nehruvian tradition of pro-Arab policy**

India's strategic foreign policy was dominated by Nehru. According to Stephen Cohen, nearly forty years after his death his ideas and policies remained influential even when India departed from them (Cohen 2001). India's first Prime Minister was sympathetic to the Arabs and to the

Palestinian cause in particular, and he made it a central theme of Indian foreign policy. According to Dixit in his memoirs, a senior minister, Arjun Singh, a senior cabinet member, even implied that establishing relations with Israel would be a departure from the traditional Nehruvian framework of Indian foreign policy. Dixit himself had replied that "There would be no departure from the Nehruvian framework because Panditji<sup>12</sup> himself had given formal recognition to Israel" (Dixit 1996).

### **India's political approach to Israel**

The anti-Israeli consensus in the Indian parliament was largely ensconced in the Congress party, so support for the government's anti-Israel and pro-Arab policy was easily had. However, criticism of these positions was voiced from the opposition bench, namely members of the BJP.<sup>13</sup> Some exceptional politicians such as Subramaniam Swamy of the Janata party even took their objection to Indian policy on Israel a step further. During his tenure as Minister of Commerce and Law (November 1990–March 1991) Subramaniam Swamy conferred, at an international conference in Belgium, with his Israeli counterpart (against the recommendation of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs); but this meeting took place only owing to Subramaniam Swamy's long supportive attitude towards Israel (which included a visit to the country in October 1982), and nothing practical came of it. November 1991 was the first time that a genuine political debate on India's policy on Israel took place in the Upper House of the parliament. In it, various opposition members attacked official Indian foreign policy. They were spearheaded by Parmod Mahajan of the BJP, Subramanyam Swamy of the Janata Party, and Yashwant Sinha of the Samajwadi Janata Party. They called for the establishment of full-fledged diplomatic relations between the two countries.

---

12 Reference to Jawaharlal Pandit Nehru. The suffix *ji* to a name is a traditional Indian form of respect.

13 Bharatiya Jannata Party (India's People Party)

---

## The domestic Muslim factor in India

The political weight of Indian Muslims declined from the 1980s. A change occurred in India's core values from commitment to secularism to some notion of cultural Hinduism. As stated above, after that decade the Congress party's attempts to use both Hindu and Muslim formulations to ensure political loyalty merely divided Indian society even deeper. The right-wing BJP benefited in the mid-1980s from several politically expedient concessions by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the Indian Muslim clergy, which were seen as blatant examples of minoritism. The Muslim secessionist movement in the Kashmir valley became more threatening and had clear religious links with extreme Muslim organizations outside India as well as with Pakistan. In particular, from 1989 the Indian government faced a sustained military threat from a series of groups claiming to represent Kashmiri sentiment in favour of joining Pakistan or becoming a separate sovereign state. The BJP made a major political issue of Jammu and Kashmir, asking if Indian Muslims could be patriotic Indians, while supporting a special status for the only state which they constituted the majority (Gupta 1995). The Muslim community was increasingly seen as an enemy of the state, funded and supported by external forces. There was a fear of the spread of militant Islam in India following the Afghan war, the Iranian revolution, the growth of fundamentalism in Pakistan, and the Islamic resurgence in Central Asia. In 1989 the Rajiv Gandhi government was simultaneously fearful of offending the Hindus and of losing Muslim votes. The result was a political impasse, in which the Hindu parties took the political initiative. Between November 1989 and February 1990 the BJP was successful in winning two state elections, exploiting the uncertainty of the majority Hindu community. From 1989 India also witnessed instances of Hindu-Muslim violence,<sup>14</sup> which had direct repercussions on the Indian political arena (and on Indo-Pakistan relations). The Congress party's trusted and vital Muslim votes were alienated since Muslims in India felt insecure and

---

14 This violence reached its peak in 1992 with the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque.

no longer saw the Congress as a dominant party that could provide security and promote the move towards equality. In fact, in the 1990s the Hindu-Muslim divide was at the centre of Indian domestic politics; its effect was to lessen the political weight of the Muslim community in India, and to make it easier for Prime Minister Rao to take the decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

## **Pressure groups**

Pressure groups did not have much influence in shaping India's foreign policy, including that towards Israel, Indian law bars them from exerting direct pressure on the government. However, their interests could be more effectively promoted through recognized political channels (Park 1962).

### *The Jewish community*

The Jewish community in India, which included the Bene Israel from Bombay, The Cochin Jews of Kerela, and the Baghdadi Jews in Bombay and Calcutta, had a little interest in Indian politics. In the past some of the Baghdadi Jews and the Bene Israel in Bombay were active in public affairs (Baghdadi Jews were appointed members of the Legislative Council of Maharashtra, of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, and Sheriffs); an exception was Lt.-Gen. J. Jacobs, who served in the Indian Army during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965. As a whole the Jews never formed any pressure group that could influence India's policy on Israel. In Bombay two Jewish organizations were active: the Indo-Israeli Friendship League, headed by the Baghdadi Jews, and the Bombay Zionist Association. Two more Jewish organizations formed later in Bombay: the All-India Jewish Federation and the Council of Indian Jewry. In New Delhi only one Jewish organization existed: the Indo-Israeli Cultural Society. None of these organizations was active in national politics or wielded any political influence. The most prominent figure in the Jewish community in India was Nissim Yechezkiel, considered one of the country's foremost poets, however he was not involved in Indian politics.

### *The Indian business sector*

Although Israel enjoyed comparative advantages in certain economic areas of interest to India (e.g., agriculture, telecommunication, electronics, machinery, medical equipment, etc.), the business community and the private business sector in India exerted no pressure on the government to change its policy on Israel, including its foreign trade policy. The only exceptions were business people in the diamond industry and the chemical industry, as well as some private sector companies, such as the Hinduja Brothers. The volume of trade between the two countries was low (Israel was a small market for industry and the Indian government did not allow the state sector to have direct trade relations with Israel). The first sign of change was in October 1991 (three months before the establishment of the diplomatic relations) when the Indian government allowed the Israeli trade attaché in Singapore to enter India, for the first time in his official capacity and with a working visa, to promote trade relations between the two countries.

### *Shalom Alumni Club*

At the end of 1957 a special unit was set up in the Israeli Foreign Ministry to coordinate international aid and cooperation activities. Israel saw its aid program as harmonizing with the social ethics taught by the Biblical Prophets and with the socialist ideas of the Zionist pioneers, but it also treated the program as a helpful instrument that could support one of Israel's foreign policy goals: to break out of its political isolation, in Asia in particular. Between 1958 and 1971 four special courses were offered in Asian countries, and 631 participants from Asia attended international courses and seminars in Israel. Of the latter, 101 participants were from India, most of them engaged in activities of the Afro-Asian Institute. All the participants of the Israeli International cooperation program became members of an alumni club of the program (the Shalom Club). However, this association was never utilized effectively as a pressure group to bring about change in Indian policy on Israel.

### *Media and public opinion*

The Gulf War, in which the surface-to-surface missiles were launched against Israel, resulted in a frenzy of Indian media coverage of Israel (mostly sympathetic, in contrast to the negative coverage endured by the USA as a superpower that injured Iraqi citizens). The momentum continued after the war, with more exposure of Israel (mostly in the Indian print media). After the release of Israeli hostages held in Jammu and Kashmir in summer 1991, along with the publicly reported visit of the Deputy Director General for Asia of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Moshe Yegar, who coordinated the release efforts,<sup>15</sup> the Indian print media came out in support of full diplomatic relations with Israel. In November that year the Indian Television network *Doordarshan* (which reaches 87% of the Indian population) dedicated an entire program to the Middle East peace process and Indo-Israel relations. Most of the interviewees on the program (mostly opponents of the ruling Congress party) likewise favoured full diplomatic relations.

### **Leadership of individuals**

According to Raja C. Mohan, conceptual breakthroughs in international relations were particularly initiated by prime ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao. This was the case regarding Israel too. Rajiv Gandhi was the first to recognize the bankruptcy of foreign policy based on non-alignment and slavish attachment to the NAM. He was constantly on the lookout for new approaches in India's engagements with the world, including the West. Rajiv Gandhi signalled a fresh Indian approach to Israel; according to Kumaraswamy,

Though unable to reverse traditional policy completely, he initiated a number of moves that later facilitated normalization. Unlike his predecessors, he openly met Israeli officials and pro-Israel leaders in the United States (Kumaraswamy 2002).

---

15 For details see the following sub-chapter: Kashmir Incident.

Again according to Kumaraswamy, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao capitalized on the changes initiated when he was Minister of External Affairs under Rajiv Gandhi. Mohan asserts that Rao who began to open up India's economy, and he created an economic link with the industrialized world (Mohan, 2003). When the pragmatic Rao became Prime Minister in June 1991 he took the practical step of establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel. He deserves credit as the ultimate decision-maker in making India's transformed attitude to Israel a political reality.

## Key Changing Circumstances

In addition to national factors, key changing circumstances as contextual variables, opened a window of opportunity in 1992 and triggered the transformation of India's policy on Israel.

### *End of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union*

The end of the bipolar world was a circumstance that rocked Indian foreign policy. Kumaraswamy saw the momentous change in India's policy on Israel as one of the fruits of the ending of the Cold War. According to him the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the paradigm of a stable new political world, also meant that non-alignment was no longer a valid notion. India could now change its policy on Israel, and Prime Minister Rao could rectify the anomaly in the relationship of the two countries which had existed for over four decades:

The end of the cold and the collapse of the Soviet Union played a significant role in this endeavour. Frequently, India's Israel policy had coincided with Cold War politics, and Israel's identification with the West had provided ideological bases for India's pro-Arab orientation (Kumaraswamy 2002).

Ali Khan maintains that the collapse of the Soviet Union, and emergence of the USA as the sole superpower propelled the events in the Middle East (peace process) and juxtaposed with the factors that made India shift its stance on Israel (Ali Khan 1992).

### *The Gulf War and the Middle East peace process*

The first Gulf war, the Madrid Conference and the Israeli-Arab contacts, in particular the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians, were other determinants of this transformation. Dixit reports that "We examined these contrasting considerations in the [external affairs] ministry" (Dixit 1996). Furthermore,

---

In the context on the foregoing development, a fundamental re-examination of India's relations with Israel became pertinent...In the post Gulf war international situation, India considered it advisable to establish diplomatic relations with Israel (Dixit 1996).

Dixit refers especially to the changing circumstances. In his memoirs he attaches great importance to the confidential contacts between Israel and the PLO in Sweden and Norway with the backing of the USA and the USSR, and the endorsement of important Arab countries. A year after the publication of memoirs he also wrote: "India had opened diplomatic relations with Israel primarily on the rationale that the PLO was itself negotiating an agreement with Israel" (*Indian Express*, 11 December 1997). Kumaraswamy took a similar approach:

The willingness of the Arabs and Palestinians to seek a political settlement with Israel through direct negotiations altered the rules of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Once the Arab states and the PLO embarked upon negotiations with Israel, there was no compelling reason for India to maintain the status quo. Moreover, Palestinian support for Iraqi president Saddam Hussein during the Kuwait crisis significantly undermined the Palestinian position. During his visit to India shortly before normalization, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat reconciled to India's new approach to the Middle East. (Kumaraswamy 2002).

In an earlier paper Kumaraswamy pointed out that the willingness of the Arab countries to secure a negotiated peace with the Jewish state and the inauguration of the Madrid peace process were the main reasons that enabled Prime Minister Rao to pursue a new policy towards Israel (Kumaraswamy 1998). A similar opinion but from a different angle, with emphasis on the Arab world, was presented by Ali Khan:

The P.L.O. chairman's visit [in the third week of January 1992] and Arafat's statement that exchange of ambassadors and recognition are acts of sovereignty make India feel that there would not be an adverse reaction in the Arab ranks (Ali Khan 1992).

### *Kashmir incident*

Moshe Yegar, Deputy Director-General for Asia in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, travelled to New Delhi following the kidnapping in June 1991 of a group of Israeli tourists at Jammu-Kashmir by Indian-Muslim terrorists (The Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front). He conducted indirect negotiations with the terrorist group and eventually the Israeli hostages were released. In New Delhi he met unofficially with senior Indian officials to try to promote bilateral relations between the two countries. His first meeting was with Ram Nath Kao, former head of India's Intelligence Agency (RAW), who was a special consultant on security matters to Prime Minister Rao, and with Naresh Chandra, Secretary of the Indian government. Both meetings were organized by M. L. Sondhi, head of the International Relations department in Nehru University. Yegar relates that Prof. Sondhi told him that Chandra had reported on his meetings to the Indian Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Minister of Finance, and Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, who attended a conference in the Maldiv Islands (Yegar 2004). The kidnapping of the Israeli tourists at Jammu-Kashmir and Yegar's visit also caused the Indian media to view Indo-Israeli relations favourably. Most of them urged the government to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, pointing out the advantages that India could gain from them.

### *Israel's international image after the Gulf War*

After the Gulf war and the start of the Middle East peace process in Madrid Israel's image in the international arena changed. Many countries established diplomatic relations with Israel or upgraded their existing relations. China, which had been watched closely by India, decided to establish full-fledged diplomatic relations with Israel, as did the Soviet Union that re-established its diplomatic ties. According to Kumaraswamy,

The inauguration of the Middle East peace process in Madrid in October 1991 enhanced Israel's international position...the peace process also

---

marked the end of Israel's prolonged political and diplomatic isolation (Kumaraswamy 2002).

### ***India's economic liberalization***

Rao's government, which assumed power in May 1991, announced liberalization measures, economic reforms, and a new industrial policy. That year the old order in India was on the verge of collapse: GDP growth was sluggish, inflation had reached double digits, the budgetary deficit was surging upward, and the economy was in tatters. Foreign exchange reserves had fallen to little more than US\$1 billion, a mere two weeks' worth of imports, and the foreign debt had climbed to more than US\$70 billion. Inflow of foreign capital and pursuit of new technology, particularly agricultural, from Israel was therefore an integral part of the new Indian economic policy. Following the economic reforms, Indian foreign policy was bound to change from politically directed to economy-oriented and internationally pragmatic. Israel at that specific time, was one of the industrialized Western countries that could help India realize its economic potential.

### ***Re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union***

The re-establishment of the diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union on 18 October 1991 and the ever closer rapprochement between Israel and the Soviet Union, and later Russia, was watched closely by India. The shared Indian and Soviet security and geopolitical outlook coincided with the anti-Israel policy of both until 1991. Cold War politics and Soviet anti-Israel policy, among the chief factors keeping India distant from Israel in the past, ceased to be relevant, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's active participation in the Middle East peace process.

### ***Establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel***

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel on

24 January 1991 had an major impact on Indian decision makers, who closely followed developments between those two countries. Their military collaboration was of special interest. India felt that after the creation of Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations it would be in its own national interest to follow suit.

### *Official visit of India's Prime Minister's to the USA*

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's official visit of to the USA in early February 1991 to attend the UN Security Council in New York further influenced the timing of the Indian decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Kumaraswamy comments:

Since 1947, Washington had been nudging India to modify its policy toward Israel. It was not accidental that [Indo-Israeli] normalization was announced on the eve of Rao's visit to New York... (Kumaraswamy 2002).

### *Opening of the Middle East peace talks*

The forthcoming third round of the Middle East peace talks, to be held in Moscow on 28-29 January 1992, encouraged India to decide on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel three days prior to that event. India knew that to join in the Middle East peace process it had to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, which would not settle for anything less. The decision allowed India to participate in the peace process and in the working groups of its multilateral channel.

## **INDO-ISRAEL RELATIONS AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1992**

The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 was a formative event in Indo-Israel relations. Subsequently, the evolving bilateral relationship, although changeable depending on the political bent of the government in power, has experienced growing convergence in strategic interests. Changes of governments in India have been of great concern to Israel, directly impacting bilateral as well as multilateral relations. Between 1996 and 1998 two United Front (UF) governments succeeded the Congress government. Then, in 1998, the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to an election victory and ruled the country for the next six years during which time substantive cooperation between the two countries grew to new heights. In May 2004 the Congress party formed and led a new United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, which embarked on a pragmatic path of strengthening bilateral relations with Israel while concurrently improving India's relations with the Arab countries. The outcome was an overall slowdown in Indo-Israel relations. However, their military cooperation intensified, concentrating on the two countries' converging strategic interests.

### **Convergence vs. divergence of strategic interests of India and Israel**

The complex evolving relations between India and Israel after the establishment of diplomatic relations after 1992 are analysed on the basis of three types of national strategic interests: joint, common, and divergent.

## Joint strategic interests

### Diplomatic relations

Since the 1990s, India's diplomatic activism in the international arena has encompassed relations with Israel. With the establishment of diplomatic relations, India has moved from an anti-Israeli and pro-Arab stance to a pragmatic and more balanced stance towards Israel, while maintaining close relations with the Arab countries. Many bilateral agreements have been signed and ratified, and dialogues as well as bilateral consultations are ongoing between the two foreign ministries, as are strategic dialogues on national security, counter-terrorism, defence, non-proliferation, trade and economy, and agriculture ([www.meaindia.nic.in](http://www.meaindia.nic.in)).

A significant contributor to the newly established relationship was the Israeli International Development Program, an integral part of the activities of the Israel's Foreign Ministry. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations (and even before) hundreds of Indians have attended training courses in Israel in areas such as agriculture, community development, public health and early childhood education, as well as management and small and medium enterprises. These are all activities in areas where Israel can share its knowledge and experience with India, by applying its expertise and innovative technology aimed at creating the best solutions for rapid and sustainable development (Yegar 2004).

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations a wave of official visits took place between the two countries. In May 1993 an Israeli Knesset delegation visited New Delhi, where the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference was being held. On 13 November 1994, the Speaker of the Lower House of the Indian parliament (Lok Sabha), Shivraj V. Patil, visited Israel. In January 1997, an Indian parliamentary delegation visited Israel. In return, an Israeli Knesset delegation again visited India, in February 1997, also to attend an IPU conference. In summer 2000, the chairperson of the India-

---

Israel Parliamentary Friendship League, Somnath Chatterjee, a leader of the Communist party in India (CPI), visited Israel, accompanied by the former Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu. This visit demonstrated how even the Indian left wing and communist parties were no longer opposed to ties with Israel. Between 25 November and 5 December 2001 a group of Israeli Members of Knesset (MKs), members of the Israel-India Parliamentary Friendship League, headed by MK Amnon Rubinstein, visited New Delhi at the invitation of the Indian parliament.

Between 1992 and 2004 chief ministers of the following Indian states visited Israel: Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, New Delhi, Kerala, and West Bengal<sup>16</sup> (Neotia 2002).

A new chapter in the relationship began in December 1996 with the visit to India of the president of Israel, Ezer Weizman. He laid the foundation of the Israeli-Indian Research and Development Farm at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in Pusa near New Delhi (*Indian Express*, 31 December 1996). The aim of the project was to introduce a variety of Israeli technologies that focused on promoting the intensive and commercially viable cultivation of agricultural crops in India. After the successful completion of the project, an intergovernmental work plan, signed on 10 May 2006, elaborated the agenda of agricultural cooperation.

As noted, in 1998 the NDA ruling coalition was formed in India. The two NDA governments were enthusiastic about ties with Israel and subsequently the two foreign ministries have held annual bilateral consultations alternately in Jerusalem and New Delhi.

In May 2004 the Indian government changed, replaced by the newly formed UPA coalition. Natwar K. Singh, Secretary-General of the Non-Aligned Movement at the time of its 1983 summit, Nehruvian in his foreign policy

---

<sup>16</sup> Kerala and West Bengal were governed by local governments headed by the communist party of India (CPI).

approach and Minister of State for External Affairs in Rajiv Gandhi's government (1986-1989), was nominated as India's Minister of External Affairs. In opposition he had been critical of the NDA governments' promotion of Israeli-Indian relations at the expense of the Palestinians (Pant 2005). In his new position he made it a point of maintaining India's traditional ties with the Palestinians and improving relations with the Arab countries, but without undermining Israeli-Indian relations. He summarized this policy in a newspaper interview in New Delhi: "We greatly value our relationship with Israel but this will not and should not affect our relations with Palestine" (*Times of India*, 12 July 2004).

The upshot of this new policy of the UPA government was that no high-ranking Indian minister paid an official visit to Israel; however, Israel's Minister of Trade, Commerce and Employment, Ehud Ulmert, visited India in December 2004, accompanied by a large trade delegation. Also, Foreign Ministry-level consultations between the two countries were held in November 2004 as was a meeting of an Indo-Israeli joint working group on counter-terrorism. Furthermore, high level Indian and Israeli Defence Ministry officials exchanged working visits in 2004, including the Indian Navy chief, the vice-chief of the Indian Army, and the chief of the Indian air force. In January 2005 Ambassador Chinmay Gharekhan was appointed special diplomatic envoy to the Middle East (West Asia). At the end of May 2005 the political ice was broken, and the Indian Minister of Science and Technology, Kapil Sibal, made the first official visit on ministerial level since the UPA government had taken power. An industrial research and development agreement was signed. On an official delegation of young Indian politicians visited Israel from 17 to 23 May 2005. On 9 June the leader of the opposition in the Upper House of the Indian parliament, Rajya Sabha, and former Minister of External Affairs, Defence and Finance Minister Jaswant Singh visited Israel. In addition to participating in a scholarly conference on Israel-Indian relations at Tel Aviv University, Singh met Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and Finance Minister, Benjamin

Netanyahu as well as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Planning Shimon Peres.

The Indian Minister for Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, Kumar Selja, attended a conference in Israel in September 2005, while her colleague, Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath, visited Israel in November. In February 2006 the Head of the Israeli National Security Council, Giora Eiland, visited India at the invitation of the Indian National Security Advisor. The following month the the Joint Committee on Agriculture convened for the first time in New Delhi. The Minister of Agriculture, Sharad Pawar, paid a visit to Israel in May (he had made a visit six months earlier to attend the 10th commemoration ceremony of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin); an intergovernmental work plan on agriculture cooperation was signed.

In November 2006 the head of the Israeli National Security Council Illan Mizrahi visited India, followed, in December, by the Minister of Trade, Industry and Labor Eli Yishai and the Director-General of the Israeli Defence Ministry Gabi Ashkenazi. In March 2007 Israel's Minister of Transport and Road Safety Shaul Mofaz arrived in India for a working visit, reciprocated in December 2007 by the Indian Minister for Railways R. Velu. The Israeli Interior Minister Meir Sheerit paid a visit to India in November 2007; and Israel's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Shalom Simhon reciprocated Minister's Pawar's visit in January 2008.

## **Defence relations**

Diplomatic relations enabled Israel and India to develop their military cooperation as a joint strategic interest. The extensive changes in India by the early 1990s significantly changed the security perspective and a stimulated a restructuring of India's defence capability (possessing the fourth largest army in the world). During that decade India underwent a transitional stage in constructing its strategic security and formulating its defence policy.

With normalized ties, Israel and India could develop their military connections based on their security and commercial interests (Pant 2005). Both countries have adopted similar positions on arms control issues and Islamic radicalism, but the real opportunity for their strategic cooperation lies in India's search for technological independence and Israel's search for military superiority over its Arab neighbours. India's substantial difficulties with upgrading and modernizing its armed forces compelled it to seek long-term collaboration with Israel. For Israel, arms exports have been an essential and integral part of its security sector since they lower the cost of production, offset the cost of research and development, reduce Israel's balance deficit, and provide employment. The Israeli defence industries cannot depend on the home market alone and about three-quarters of its production has to be exported. India presents an attractive and challenging opportunity as a market for Israel's defence industry. In sum, India's search for technology and Israel's need to make its defence research a viable economical entity are complementary (Klieman 1990). Good examples of this military collaboration are the Israeli Heron Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (*India Defence*, 4 October 2006), the Indian AAD-02 Air Missile Interceptor, based on Israeli "Green Pine" radar, as part of India's ballistic missile defence (BMD) (*Jane*, 2 January 2008), and the three Falcon air early warning control systems (AWACS) built by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) for India (*India Today*, 12 January 2009). In August 2008 the two countries agreed to jointly develop a new version of the Spyder surface-to-air missile system. (*Asia Times*, 2 April 2009). In March 2009 IAI signed a \$1.4 billion contract with India for air defence systems, including seaborne and shore-based systems against missile attack (*India Defence*, 26 March 2009). The first of the three AWACS was delivered to India on 25 May 2009 (*India Defence*, 22 May 2009).

The national security factor has evolved into the dominant feature of Israel-Indian relations, being based on the convergence of strategic and national security interests; India has gradually emerged as Israel's most important

---

arms market. The Afghanistan war, the war in Iraq (the second Gulf War), the Kargil War in 1999 with Pakistan, the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, the terror attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi in December 2001, and the Mumbai terror attack in November 2008 all proved key determinants in India's move towards military collaboration with Israel. The working sessions and mutual visits of military officials still continue. Demand by the Indian military for Israeli-made equipment has increased, to make Israel India's second largest weapons supplier (after Russia).

The change of government in India in 2004 (also in Israel) did not affect the level of military cooperation. The Indian Defence Minister in the UPA government, Pranab Mukherjee, declared publicly: "There will be no change in the existing defense ties between India and Israel" (*Indian Express*, 1 July 2004). After a four-year hiatus, strategic talks between India and Israel resumed in December 2005 (*Indian Express*, 12 December 2005). A Joint Defense Ministerial Committee convenes regularly to discuss military cooperation and military topics of mutual concern. Israeli-Indian military cooperation is undoubtedly a key joint strategic interest in the bilateral defence relations. In June 2006 two Indian warships sailed to Israel on a goodwill visit. Israel's Deputy Chief of General Staff, Maj.-Gen. Moshe Kaplinsky led an Israeli military delegation to India in June 2007, and in January 2008 Admiral Shureesh Mehta, Chairman of the Indian Chiefs of Staff Committee, visited Israel and on 6 December 2009 Israeli army chief of staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazy paid a reciprocal visit to India (*DefenseNews*, 6 December, 2009).

## **Economic relations**

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Israel and India have witnessed tremendous growth in their economic relations and have implemented many measures to promote them, including an agreement on agricultural cooperation signed in December 1993 and an intergovernmental work plan on agricultural cooperation signed on 10 May 2006. Following the

economic changes in India since 1992, India shifted the focus of its foreign policy from international politics to economic development, mindful of how far it had fallen behind the rest of Asia. India began to look for foreign investment, joint ventures to hone expertise, especially in high tech, and for new markets to improve its exports and foreign trade. The volume of Israeli-Indian trade grows significantly every year, concentrating, among other areas, on high-tech, software, telecommunication, medical equipment, bio-technology, pharmaceuticals, machinery, agricultural equipment, and chemicals; there is also the traditional diamond trade. India is a huge market, and is Israel's ninth largest trading partner worldwide, its second largest in Asia. The agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), signed in January 2006, as well as the two countries' intention to sign a Preferential Trade Agreement, has the potential to contribute to further increase in the trade volume and their joint ventures.

Israeli investments have flowed into India, and Israeli R&D and technology have likewise been transferred there. In recent years Indian companies have started investing in Israel in fields such as irrigation equipment, pharmaceuticals, and information technology, including joint ventures set up in both countries. They have direct air connections: El Al, Israel's national airline, operates four weekly commercial flights to Bombay (Mumbai), as well as freighter flights to and from India. ZIM, Israel's shipping line, has a permanent agency in India and Israeli vessels dock regularly at Indian ports. In August 2005 ZIM India was officially inaugurated as a fully owned representative office in India. The Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), in cooperation with ZIM, also provides services to and from Israel (*Jerusalem Post – Special Supplement*, 2006). In tourism, annually since the 1990s nearly 75,000 Israelis have visited India and about 25,000 Indians have visited Israel. In 2008 the volume of the bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$4.15 billion. As noted above, in the last decade India has become Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia.

## Counter-terrorism cooperation

Counter-terrorism is another key area that plays a role in Indo-Israeli cooperation. India has shown considerable interest in Israel's internal security technology, equipment and methods, for use against cross-border terrorism in Kashmir and insurgencies in the north-eastern states (Kumar 2001). Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism have been issues of concern for both Israel and India, particularly after 11 September 2001 and the Mumbai attack on 26 November 2008.

The gradual globalization of Islamic terrorism after 11 September 2001 improved counter-terror cooperation between the two states. International collaboration became an urgent priority, and the war on terror that followed appeared to create a better climate for Israeli-Indian cooperation in this domain particularly. Israel and India have diversified and expanded the range of issues discussed at the Joint Working Counter-Terrorism Group, including combating international terror. Seminars on subjects such as border security, suicide bombers, aviation security and the financing of terrorism, as well as information security including digital and cyber warfare, have been held in India by Israeli experts (*Times of India*, 30 May 2005).

The globalization of Islamic fundamentalism and the deepening connection between Kashmiri and Palestinian militant organizations, as well as the Mumbai terror attack of 26 November 2008, which among other targets devastated a Jewish cultural centre and which experts in India believe received active support of the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies, create mutual concern in Israel and India. Both countries believe that fighting the menace of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism will enhance peace and security in the Middle East and South Asia.

## **Intelligence cooperation**

Intelligence cooperation is commensurate with counter-terrorism cooperation and is one of the key areas of collaboration between the two countries. Radical Islamism, both at home and in the immediate vicinity, has cemented this intelligence cooperation. In addition to the terrorism India faces in Kashmir, the attack by Al-Qaeda on a US Navy ship at Aden in October 2000 added another area of concern for India pertaining to possible maritime terrorism. The 11 September 2001 terrorist strike, and the precision with it was planned and executed, were sources of serious concern for both Israel and India and intensified their intelligence cooperation. All the aspects of terror listed here and in the foregoing section prove the need for intelligence cooperation between India and Israel as part of counter-terror cooperation.

## **Space cooperation**

While Israel's space efforts centre on its high-resolution imaging capabilities, India's space program, which is one of the country's success stories, covers a wide range of activities in launch vehicles, satellites and space applications. India builds a wide variety of remote sensing, meteorological, and communications satellites, which it launches with its own rockets.

The heads of the two countries' space organizations exchanged visits in December 2004 to finalize the space agreement between them. In September 2007 India launched Israel's TECSAR satellite (*India Defence*, 17 July 2007) and the two countries are collaborating on India's next generation satellite, RISAT 2 (*Makor Rishon*, 07 April 2009). On 27-28 February 2008 Dr. Abdul Kalam, former president of India, delivered a lecture at the 48th Israel Annual Conference on Aerospace Sciences, and on 20 April 2009 India launched an Israeli border-control imaging satellite that enables it to monitor its borders with Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan (*Jane*, 29 April 2009).

## Common strategic interests

### Science and technology cooperation

The growth of bilateral economic ties between Israel and India includes cooperation in science and technology. There is an agreement on science and technology, a science and technology industrial research fund (amounting to \$3 million) and an agreement to facilitate bilateral cooperation and exchanges in the field of science and technology; an additional Protocol of science and technology cooperation also exists.

Between 1995 and 1997 seven Memoranda of Understanding were signed regarding research projects in the field of advanced materials. Two of these projects were in information technology (IT).

In November 1999, under the Protocol of Cooperation the office of the Israel's Chief Scientist and India's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) agreed on joint research and development, as well as eleven other projects. The agreement also provided a framework for the exchange of researchers and for national conferences on scientific issues. In February 2002 an Israeli delegation representing twelve leading companies in telecommunications and Information technology visited India. Moreover, joint committee meetings on science and technology began regularly to convene. A meeting on biotechnology was held in Israel in February 2004 and a science and technology joint committee meeting followed in July 2004. On 30 May 2005, during the visit to Israel by India's Minister of Science and Technology, Kapil Sibal, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on Israeli-Indian Industrial, Research and Development Initiative Cooperation (IIRDC) and agreed to set up a joint research and development fund (*Jerusalem Post – Special Supplement*, 26 January 2006).

## Nuclear power policy coordination

Israel and India have not signed the NPT (Israel but not India did sign the CTBT in 1996) and therefore have common ground for formulating a coordinated diplomatic policy pertaining to that matter.

The Congress party government in the 1990s, as well as the two UF governments that followed (1996-1998) did not support the idea of nuclear tests; however, the NDA government headed by the BJP conducted two nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998 respectively. Unlike the USA, but similar to other Asian countries, Israel did not react to the Indian nuclear test conducted in May 1998 and did not react when New Delhi tested the Agni, India's intermediate-range ballistic missile in January 2002.

India and Israel have officially denied the existence of any nuclear cooperation between them. However, both countries share concern over Pakistan's nuclear capability and Israel has been always concerned about seepage of nuclear technologies to radical Arab countries in the Middle East. Israel has a vital interest in preventing the transfer of nuclear capability from Pakistan to the Middle East, and it is in Israel's national interest that Pakistani nuclear capability be confined to South Asia and that no nuclear technology be transferred to the Middle East. Israel cannot rule out the possibility of nuclear technology spilling over to the Middle East, in particular after the publication of A. Q. Khan's sales of nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea (*Dawn*, 25 January 2004). Khan, founder of the Pakistani nuclear program, sold nuclear technology on the international black market and was deposed from his position as advisor to the President of Pakistan. Taking into consideration the political instability in Pakistan, the Pakistani nuclear capability, which has been of concern to India and Israel, constitutes a mutual security challenge for both countries in particular since Pakistan has been radicalized gradually.

Aware of India's close ties with Iran, Israel has repeatedly expressed its

concern to India about a possible nuclear technology leak or transfer of nuclear related information to Iran, a country that is developing nuclear capabilities and which Israel regards as a strategic threat to its national security. The Indo-US nuclear deal of 18 July 2005 is of great interest to Israel as such an agreement could set a precedent for Israel and clear the way for an Israeli request to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), despite the fact that Israel, like India, is not a signatory to the NPT. Such an arrangement would enable Israel to build a civilian nuclear reactor for energy supplying purposes in southern Israel (*Yediot Acharonot*, 31 July 2009). The two countries will probably have to coordinate their policy regarding the NPT ahead of the treaty review in May 2010.

## USA

The war on international terrorism and improvement of relations with the USA also had to do with the Israel connection, in the eyes of Indian policy makers. After September 11 there was a growing understanding in India, and also in Israel, that Indo-American-Israeli cooperation was likely to yield considerable benefits for all three parties. The Indian leadership became increasingly convinced that the American Jewish lobby constituted a vital link of influence in US policy making, as well as finance. During the tenures of the NDA governments some forces in India supported the idea of formulating a tripartite axis between the USA, India and Israel as three democracies sharing a common vision; nothing came of this.

A new framework for US-India's defence relations was signed on 28 June 2005 by the Bush administration, and was followed by favourable US policy on India, demonstrated in the Indo-US nuclear accord of 18 July 2005. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who visited India in July 2009, stated that her trip would serve as the first step to upgrading the relationship between the two countries. Indian leaders believed that Israel, by means of the American Jewish lobby, could help their country by promoting its interests in the USA, as well as raising India's concern about the substantial increase in US

military and economic aid to Pakistan. The shared values of democracy and the common interest in counter-terror cooperation, science and technology, communication and cyber security might be a binding factor among India, Israel and the USA.

## **Russia**

Israel's expertise in Russian military equipment paved the way for trilateral military cooperation among India, Israel and Russia, as already successfully accomplished earlier with the upgrading of the avionics of the Indian MIG 21s and of the T-72 tanks, as well as the installation of Israel's Falcon AWACS, sold to India, on Russian Ilyushin military aircraft. Furthermore, Russia is an active participant in the Middle East process, in which India has great interest. The trilateral cooperation enjoys common ground in the field of energy, and in counter-terrorism especially in Central Asia. India and Russia both regard this region as part of their extended vicinity. Industrial cooperation, including diamond processing, is another potential field for trilateral cooperation (Joshi 2005).

## **Geo-strategy**

The geo-strategic locations of India and Israel - both on the flank of major Arab countries and an Islamic bloc - encourages their strategic cooperation. It is based on common political interests in the region, particularly in dealing with the menace of Islamic fundamentalism and terror, as exemplified by the Mumbai terror attack in November 2008.

Until 1991 the Cold War and India's socialist economic policy undoubtedly undermined India's status and primacy in the Indian Ocean. However, through its new foreign policy since 1992, India showed every intention of becoming an important player in this region (known in India as the vision of the British Viceroy Lord Curzon) and has a strategic interest to maintain the security of maritime traffic and the sea lanes to the Straits of Malacca. In

fact, the Indian navy has become a key player in this activity.

The Indian Ocean has become important for Israel's security too. It needs offshore strategic depth to sustain a second-strike capability, and this can be found in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, Asia is an important destination for Israeli trade, and India is one of the key actors, in geo-strategic terms, in safeguarding the commercial shipping routes between the Middle East, Israel and Asia. Martin Sherman explains the situation as follows:

Joint Indo-Israeli naval cooperation may well assume vital importance particularly because possible advantages in satellite surveillance technique... especially in terms of maintaining deterrent retaliatory capabilities... (Sherman 1999).

Ephraim Inbar gives more details:

The three new Israeli submarines are equipped with long-range cruise missile launching capability. One such missile was tested in the Indian Ocean, generating reports about Indian-Israeli naval cooperation (Inbar 2004).

## **Asia**

India has gradually emerged as an Asian regional force since 1994 with its "Look East policy", initiated by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Israeli technology and expertise helped India to promote its trade relations with Asia as part of its reformed economic policy, particularly towards Asia. Israel, for its part, still struggling for full international legitimacy in Asia, is aware that its relations with India could be instrumental in helping it to achieve such legitimacy, as well as upgrading its international status in Asia. The agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the Indian plan to sign a trade agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will increase the economic appeal of the Asian Continent.

## Central Asia

India has historical strategic and cultural relations with Central Asia. However, it has been obliged to repair its earlier ruinous policy on Afghanistan, especially its compliance with the Soviet invasion of that country from 1979. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, India has sought to secure its political and economic presence in the Central Asian countries in order to preserve the moderate religious character of their regimes, gain access to their energy resources, and limit Pakistani influence in the region.

India and Israel strive to be regarded as significant players in the region, considering the high level of involvement and competition with Russia (formerly the Soviet Union), the USA, China, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. For both countries, Central Asia is an extended strategic vicinity (Inbar 2004). The two countries have sold military equipment to the Central Asian republics, have an economic interest in the region including the field of energy, and endeavour to limit the influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia as agents of radical Islamization in this region.

## Pakistan

In the early 1990s several publications in the international media contemplated the possibility that India and Israel were considering a joint strike on a Pakistani nuclear power station at Kahuta. Dinesh Kumar (2001) wrote that the two countries were engaged in secret dialogue over this possibility, but in the end it did not materialize. Naaz (2000) asserts that Israel did provide India with satellite intelligence on Pakistan as part of their bilateral intelligence cooperation. Harsh Pant adds that India and Israel also exchanged intelligence information on Islamic terrorist groups, and Israel helped India to fight terrorism in Kashmir with logistic support. The Kargil crisis between India and Pakistan in 1999 significantly enlarged military cooperation between India and Israel quantitatively and qualitatively,

although the two countries emphasized that their defence ties were not directed against any specific third party. Israel sent laser-guided missiles to India, making it possible for the Indian air force to destroy Pakistani bunkers in the Kargil mountains (Pant 2005).

In the past, Israel feared that Pakistan would become a supplier of intermediate range missile to Arab countries in the Middle East and Iran (Inbar 2004). Military experts in India believe that Pakistan was connected to the Mumbai terror attack on 26 November 2008, which, they maintain, could not have been perpetrated without the active support of the Pakistani military as well as Pakistani intelligence agencies (Rajiv 2009). Elevated American dependence on Pakistan pertaining to its military actions against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as the American supply of sophisticated weaponry to Pakistan, have caused concern to India as well as Israel. The latter has been particularly concerned about possible seepage of nuclear technologies out of Pakistan, authorized by the Pakistani government or as part of a rogue operation.

## Divergent strategic interests

### United Nations

India's successful economic reforms of the early 1990s renewed the country's hope that rapid growth would be the basis for its becoming a major world power. The question then arose as to India's place vis-à-vis the UN, particularly its aspiration to become a permanent member of the Security Council (Mohan 2005). As a result, India's voting in international organizations, the UN in particular, has been a fixed item on the Indo-Israeli agenda since they established diplomatic relations. From 1992 India ceased to sponsor anti-Israeli UN resolutions; however it continued to support the Palestinian cause at the UN General Assembly and committees while abstaining on the nuclear issue (Yegar 2004).

In September 2001, despite Arab pressure and the visit of the PLO leader Yasser Arafat to New Delhi, India refused to support the resolution equating Zionism with racism in the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) section of the UN-sponsored World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa.

An Indian regiment has been part of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is posted on the border between Lebanon and Israel.<sup>17</sup>

In December 2003 India supported a UN resolution requesting the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to render an advisory opinion on the legality of Israel's security wall (although 74 out of 191 assembly members abstained). Israel's expectation that India would abstain from voting on issues of the Israeli-Arab conflict faded in May 2004 with the formation of the UPA coalition government in India, supported by the Indian communist parties, however India continued its policy not to sponsor anti-Israeli resolutions.

---

17 UNIFIL was created in March 1978 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and secure the border areas between the two countries.

---

## Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

For years, India took the path of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) by limiting its diplomatic interaction with Israel. However, during the 1990s the altered international system, most notably the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, forced India to examine the relevance of non-alignment policy in its foreign relations, including those regarding Israel. India shifted from a Third World policy to the promotion of its own interests (as did most developing countries) internationally as well as nationally. As pointed out by Raja Mohan:

The imperatives of economic globalization and reconstruction of Indian foreign policy in a world without the Soviet Union compelled India to unveil a new foreign policy agenda without appearing to reject the old commitments and the NAM (Mohan 2003).

From the 1990s the NAM's influence on Indian diplomacy steadily eroded as India sought to reconstruct its foreign policy to meet the requirements of the post-Cold War world. The dominance of multilateral diplomacy and the NAM in Indian foreign policy began to be questioned and India started to focus on issues of concern for its national interest. The BJP did not refer to Non-Alignment as a major principle in India's foreign policy. In fact, the BJP governments marginalized the concept of Non-Alignment and had fewer illusions about the relevance of past Indian foreign policy and old commitments to the notion of non-alignment as well as to the movement itself. Still, Prime Minister Vajpayee did attend the NAM summit in Durban in 1998.

Israel was a direct beneficiary of the changed Indian attitude to the NAM. Traditionally, the political dynamics in the organization unconditionally favoured the Arab world; it held a rigid anti-Israeli position and participated in solidarity demonstrations with the Palestinian cause. But after its change of direction India made serious attempts to moderate NAM resolutions

against Israel, even though it remained an active member of the NAM's Palestine committee. In August 2004 India sent an official note to Malaysia, as the chair of the NAM, expressing its reservations about the anti-Israeli Palestinian Declaration adopted at the summit of the organization's foreign ministers in Durban that called for sanctions against Israel. Following the change of government in 2004, India resumed its strong support for the Palestinian cause in the NAM. In July 2008, at the ministerial meeting in Tehran of the NAM Committee on Palestine, India's Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee, pledged to continue to work with other members of the committee in an endeavour to collectively support the Palestinian cause; India's Prime Minister Singh did likewise in July 2009 at the 15th summit of the NAM at Sharm al-Sheikh.

## **Energy and oil**

India is the sixth largest energy consumer in the world. Its intention to sustain its high level of economic growth since 1991 has required a high level of oil reserves. India depends on the Middle East for its energy needs. According to Mohan (2003), since the 1990s India has adopted the concept of energy security in which relationships have been developed with the oil supply countries and the Gulf countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia in particular, which go beyond simple buying and selling. India has actually transformed its relations with Saudi Arabia, previously considered by India to be a strong supporter of Pakistan. Friendly relations have developed between them, reaching a peak with the official visit of the Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh to Saudi Arabia in January 2001. It was the first official visit by an Indian minister since the visit of Prime Minister Nehru to the desert kingdom in 1950. The Indian ministers of Petroleum and Finance paid visits to Saudi Arabia as well.

In the case of Iran, following the visit there of the Indian Minister of Petroleum in June 2004, India purchased natural gas from Iran worth \$7.5 million; and at the time of writing a gas pipeline project (from Iran to

India through Pakistan) is on their agenda (Pattanayak 2001). The Arab oil producers have evolved from being merely a source of oil to economic and political partners. Energy cooperation has emerged as the dominant feature of Indo-Gulf relations as India, owing to the changes in its economy, is on the way to become one of the Gulf oil producers' most important customers.

India's policymakers must ensure access to safe and affordable energy resources in order to sustain its economic growth. Consequently, an energy coordination committee chaired by Prime Minister Singh himself was set up in July 2005 to address the country's energy security concerns (Dadwal 2005).

India's stance on the Middle East issue and the Arab–Israel conflict, which supported the Palestinian cause and the Arabs, was shaped by India's dependence on oil and energy resources from the Arab countries and the Gulf region. India dependence on outside energy resources, its the demand for oil-based products such as petrochemicals and fertilisers and the availability of Arab oil made the relationship between India and the Gulf countries an important factor in Indian foreign policy. India's maintenance of good relations with the Arab countries to ensure its future oil needs makes Arab oil a key factor in Indo-Israel relations.

## **People's Republic of China (PRC)**

India's relations with China are based on its location and history. The border dispute between them is still one of India's main security concerns (nearly 7,000 km of their 16,560 km border is disputed). After the Cold War, the Indian focus shifted from the Soviet Union to the international consequences of China's rise as a regional power in Asia. In the 1990s, after the Gulf war, India seemed to overcome its trauma from the 1962 war with China and tried to normalize relations between them. India also reassessed its role in the balance of power in Asia, while trying to regain parity with China, which meanwhile was becoming a global power. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's

historic visit to China in December 1988 created a new political basis for bilateral relations after an extended period of stasis, and it mitigated the intensity of the boundary dispute. Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng visited India in 1991, and India's Prime Minister Narasimha Rao reciprocated with a visit to Beijing in 1992 that further enhanced bilateral relations. Towards the end of that decade India embarked on normalization of relations with China, while keeping a watchful eye on China's aspirations of becoming a superpower internationally, and in Asia in particular (Mohan 2003).

A new highpoint in Indo-Chinese relations was achieved with China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to India in May 2005, when the two sides agreed to a road map to settle their border conflict. It contained eleven guiding principles on the basis of which the dispute would be resolved. By moving closer to China, India also saw an opportunity to weaken Chinese-Pakistani ties. This improvement in relations notwithstanding, China still represented a source of concern for India economically, and militarily too, although no longer a direct military threat. China continued to be the main supplier of military and nuclear technology to Pakistan, including aid to build a naval base in Gwadar, which could control access to the Persian Gulf. China also helped Myanmar and Bangladesh with naval facilities, and the Chinese military build-up was viewed with concern by India (Mansingh 2005).

Until several years ago, Chinese-Israeli relations, especially their military cooperation, were of concern to India and were watched closely. However, owing to US pressure the military collaboration between China and Israel has declined significantly.

## **Iran**

An obvious example of divergence between Israel and India in foreign policy is the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the mid-1990s, India has improved its relations with the latter. According to Ansari (2000) the

---

key reasons for the improvement were security, common opposition to the Taliban, energy needs, shared interests in Central Asia, including the search for alternative routes into the region, and economic relations.

Visits to Iran were made by the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh in May 2000, and by Prime Minister Vajpayee in April 2001. The latter was reciprocated by the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami when he visited India in January 2003; these exchanges consolidated the countries' relations (Mohan 2003). The Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar visited Tehran in the beginning of 2005 and signed an agreement in the field of energy; and the Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh visited Iran in September 2005. On 29 April 2008 Iranian President Ahamdinejad stopped over in New Delhi on his way to a state visit to Sri Lanka, and met Prime Minister Singh. Among other issues, Iran's nuclear energy as well as India's votes against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were brought up. After the meeting the Indian Minister of External Affairs made the following statement:

Our approach is quite clear. We have said that Iran has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy for fulfilling her various obligations and that the right way to do that is through the IAEA, to assure the world that she is fulfilling her obligations (*MEA*, 29 April 2008).

Indo-Iranian trade in 2008 was worth \$10 billion. In March 2009 the Secretary of the Supreme National Council of Iran visited India to review Indo-Iran relations. Iran does not recognize the state of Israel. Its President has denied the Holocaust, and the country's antagonism to Israel is demonstrated in its support for terror organizations in the Middle East such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, most notably in the Second Lebanon War in June 2006, and for Hamas and the Islamic Jihad on the West Bank and Gaza, and also in its constant inflammatory anti-Israeli rhetoric. In July 2003 Iran announced the operational deployment of surface-to-surface Shihab 3 missiles, which put

Israel within striking distance (Inbar 2004).<sup>18</sup> At present Iran is considered close to having the capacity to build a nuclear bomb. Israel regards Iran's Islamic government and fundamentalist regime as a strategic threat and a danger to its very existence, beyond its being a serious danger to the stability of the entire region, in view of the ongoing build-up of Iran's nuclear capabilities.

Israel has regularly expressed its concern about Iran's nuclear capabilities as well as India's close ties with Tehran. The possibility of India selling advanced technology and military equipment to Iran has been brought up at meetings between military representatives of the two countries, so the close India–Iran relations may be considered a matter of strategic discord between them.

## **Islamic world**

Traditionally, relations with the Islamic world have been pivotal in India's foreign policy. In the past India persistently tried to create a mutuality of economic interests with Muslim countries in the Middle East. It stressed India's historic links with the Islamic world, while trying to avoid excessive focus on Kashmir and tensions with Pakistan. It also tried to neutralize Pakistan and its ability to play the Islamic card against India. Despite India's traditional friendly relations with the Islamic world, Israeli–Indian military collaboration provided Pakistan with justification for mobilizing the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) against India, so that strictures were passed against it. The OIC has been critical of India's policies in Kashmir, and a number of Gulf states allowed their citizens to fight their as part of a pan-Islamic Jihadist movement (Cohen 2001). From the 1990s, India changed its position and no longer objected to ties between Pakistan and Islamic countries, however the OIC has continued its traditional support of Pakistan.

---

18 A two-stage missile with a 1,300 km range.

---

With the return to power of the Congress party-led UPA government in May 2004, E. Ahamed, representative of the Muslim League in the state of Kerala, was appointed Minister of State for External Affairs. His nomination reflected the new government's wish to improve its relations with the Islamic world, the Arab countries and the Indian Muslim community. In January 2005 Chinmay Gharekhan was appointed special envoy of the Prime Minister to the Middle East. Despite the new government's will to improve its relations with the Muslim world, the OIC continued to endorse the Pakistan-backed militants in Kashmir. In return, India rejected a resolution passed in July 2005 on Jammu-Kashmir by the foreign ministers of the OIC in Yemen, claiming that the OIC had no standing on that issue, which was an internal Indian matter. On the other hand, India made an effort to improve its bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, other Arab Gulf states, Turkey and Iran. In fact, it tried to find common ground with them regarding support for political moderation and against religious extremism, taking advantage of the fact that religious extremism had altered the political discourse in the Islamic world (Mohan 2003).

## **Arab world**

India traditionally pursued a pro-Arab foreign policy, regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular, mainly to counter Pakistani influence in southern Asia and to secure access to Middle Eastern oil and gas resources (Heitzman and Worden 1995). This policy changed after the Gulf War, for reasons including the evolving relations with Israel based on India's perception that close relations with both Israel and the Arab world would be more beneficial for it (Kumar 2001).

In July 1999 the Arab League for the first time openly warned of what it considered the danger of the growing Israeli-Indian military cooperation. After 11 September 2001 India found more common political ground with key Arab countries based on the shared perception of the need for political modernization and opposition to religious fanaticism and extremism. This

had begun with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s and the political convergence between India and a large number of Arab countries that followed.<sup>19</sup> On 22-23 March 2005 the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed, a leader of the Muslim League party of the state of Kerala, represented India as an observer at the Arab League summit in Algeria for the first time. Since then India has regularly attended the Arab summits as an observer.

As part of India's new forward-looking foreign policy, its partnership with the Gulf countries and the accompanying energy security has been of great consequence as India is the biggest potential consumer of natural gas resources in the Gulf and Central Asia. About 4.5 million Indians work in the Gulf and Arab countries, transferring more than \$10 billion to India annually. The total trade volume between India and the Arab countries in 2008 was estimated at around \$90 billion, and the Gulf and the Arab countries have become India's economic partners.

After the 1990s, and the aforementioned shift from India's pro-Arab position in their dispute with Israel to a more balanced stance, India recognized that it must be able to do business with all sides in the Middle East, but without ignoring India's economic and political interest in the region:

As India quickly discovered, it did not have to choose between Arabs and Israelis, it could do business with both. India's new Middle East policy recognized the shades of grey in the region and acknowledged the pragmatism of the Arabs themselves, who did not really object to India's new relations with Israel...India's support could no longer be taken for granted by the Arabs in its disputes with the US and Israel. This new Indian approach was to develop equities on both sides, and New Delhi was loath to project itself as a potential interlocutor between Israel and the Arabs (Mohan 2003).

---

19 The Taliban ("Students of Islamic Knowledge Movement") ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001.

Since 2004 there has been an improvement in Indian–Arab relations; in fact, India traditionally maintains close and good relationship with many countries in the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf. Such relations bring India, first and foremost, economic dividends and energy security. The improvement in relations also has helped India to build a regional coalition to contain terrorism, as well as neutralizing Pakistan’s ability to play the Israeli card, especially in the case of Kashmir. India’s latest claim for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is another reason for its political motivation to maintain good relations with the Arab countries and for its pro-Arab stance in the international arena.

A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between India and the Arab League in December 2008.

## **Palestinian Authority**

Despite its good relations with Israel, India has traditionally been a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause. This support has been particularly demonstrated by India’s Muslim organizations (there are about 140 million Muslims in India), by its left-wing parties, and by traditionalists in the Congress party elite and in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

The Oslo Accords in 1991 and the second Palestinian uprising (intifada) in September 2000 were the two major events that had an impact on Indian policy towards the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In between, in June 1996, India nominated an official diplomatic representative for the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA Chairman Yasser Arafat paid a state visit to New Delhi in November 1997 and a working visit in April 1999.

During the visit of Israel’s Prime Minister Sharon to India in September 2003, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee indicated that the visit would boost military and trade ties between the two countries; however, India’s support of the Palestinian cause would not be diluted (*The Hindu*, 11 September

2003). In August 2003 the premises of the Indian representative office to the PA were transferred from Gaza to Ramallah. In winter 2003 India supported the transfer of the case of Israel's Security Fence to the ICJ in The Hague.

When the new UPA coalition government was formed by the Congress party in May 2004, the following proclamation, as part of the common minimal program of the UPA, was made:

The UPA Government reiterated India's decades-old commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people for a homeland of their own. (*The Pioneer*, 21 June 2004)

In September 2004 the new government, in a symbolic gesture, sent Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed to visit the Palestinian Authority, as well as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Ahamed he met Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders, and his visit was described as a symbolic move by the new Indian government demonstrating its strong support for Palestinian cause while calling on Israel to lift the siege imposed on Arafat's headquarters (Pant 2005). A multiparty official Indian delegation headed by the Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh attended Arafat's funeral ceremony in Cairo on 12 November 2004. India sent observers to the general election of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in January 2005, followed by a note congratulating Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) on his election as the new leader (President) of the Palestinian Authority and Arafat's successor. The same month Ambassador Chinmay R. Gharekhan was appointed India's special envoy to West Asia and the Middle East Peace Process.<sup>20</sup> This post was devised by the UPA government in its desire to improve its relationship with the Arab world. It also wanted to be portrayed as a true supporter of the Palestinian cause as well as the Palestinian quest for an independent state, in contrast with the previous NDA government. That government had been led by the BJP, which was perceived as pro-Israeli. India participated

---

20 Gharekhan is an ex-career diplomat of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs who formerly served as UN Under-Secretary and special UN Coordinator to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

---

in the Sharm al-Sheikh summit in February 2005, represented by Ashwani Kumar, the Trade and Industry Minister. Following this meeting, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued the following statement in support of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process:

India has consistently urged an end to violence from all sides. We look forward to further progress in the peace process that would bring about a just and peaceful solution within a reasonable timeframe, leading to a sovereign, independent state of Palestine with well-defined and secured borders, living in peace with the state of Israel (*MEA*, 13 February 2005).

The newly appointed envoy Gharekhan visited Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in February 2005. In Israel he met Vice-Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom; on his visit to the PA he met the newly elected President Abbas as well as the Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. In March he met the President of Lebanon Emil Lahud, as well as the Secretary-General of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hassan Nasralla. Israel officially protested against Gharekhan's meeting with Nasralla (Gerberg 2005). Since his appointment Gharekhan has regularly met Mahmud Abbas, as well as many other Palestinian officials, and he is a frequent visitor in the Middle East. On 19-20 May 2005 Abbas paid a visit to New Delhi, where he met the Indian President Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Singh, as well as the President of the Congress party Sonia Gandhi.

The Indian MEA welcomed Israel's unilateral disengagement and withdrawal from settlements in Gaza and the northern West Bank in August 2005:

...A positive development and the beginning of a process that we hope will culminate in a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement in accordance with the roadmap and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We trust that this window of opportunity will be used by all sides in taking forward the negotiations that will lead, within a reasonable time frame, to the creation of a truly sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State within well-defined and secure borders, living side by side at peace with Israel (*MEA*, 13 September 2005).

In a speech in the Indian parliament on 27 June 2006 Prime Minister Singh expressed his concern about the worsening of the conflict in Lebanon as a factor adversely affecting the Indian national interest. But on the same day India condemned the abduction of an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, near Gaza. One day earlier, in the Lower House of the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) the left-wing parties strongly condemned Israel's retaliation in Lebanon in which Israel, according to them, targeted civilians and infrastructures. In response, the Speaker of the Knesset, Dalia Itzik, sent a letter of protest to the Speaker of the Indian parliament in which she expressed her disappointment at the absence of any reference in the debate in the Indian Parliament to Hezbollah's actions against Israeli civilians.

During February and March 2007 India issued two official statements supporting the agreement on the formation of the National Unity Government in the PA (the Mecca Agreement). Despite Israel's strong protest an Indian diplomatic representative to the PA met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniya. In May 2007 India expressed concern over the escalating violence in Palestine and Israel, as well as the arrest of elected representatives of the Palestinian National Council (PNC). On 13 July 2007 India condemned the abduction of two Israeli soldiers at the Israel–Lebanon border, but at the same time equally strongly condemned the excessive and disproportionate military retaliation by Israel in the Second Lebanon War (also called the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War).

In September 2007 India's Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee met Abu-Mazen in New York and the Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed visited the PA. One month later, in October 2007, Abu-Mazen paid a visit to India. During his visit the UPA government conveyed \$15 million for assistance to the Palestinian Authority (including \$3 million for educational projects). In November 2007, India participated in the Annapolis summit. The Indian delegation was led by the Minister for Science and Technology Kapil Sibal, who expressed India's wish to play its due role in the collective endeavour to strengthen the forces of peace and stability in the

---

Middle East. The following month, at a donors' conference in Paris, India announced an additional commitment of \$5 million to the PA. In January and March 2008 India issued two statements expressing its dismay at the continuing violence in "occupied Palestine" and called for an immediate end to the cycle of violence, which led to avoidable civilian casualties including innocent children. In October 2008 India signed a memorandum of understanding with the PA concerning the construction of the Jawaharlal Nehru High School at Abu Dis (near Jerusalem).

Between 6 and 9 October 2008 Mahmud Abbas paid a state visit to New Delhi, during which the foundation stone was laid of the Palestinian Chancery building (a gift of the government of India) in the city, in the presence of the Indian Prime Minister Singh. In his keynote speech the Premier announced an additional grant of \$20 million to the PA. Following Israel's military operation against the Hamas in Gaza Strip (Operation Cast Lead), a statement was issued by the government of India on the situation in Gaza on 27 December 2008, in it India admitted that it was aware of the cross-border provocations in the form of Palestinian rocket attacks against targets in southern Israel. In a second statement on 29 December, India expressed its hope that the military action by Israel would abate and indicated that the continued use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force was unwarranted and condemnable. On 2 January 2009 India urged an immediate end to the violence and on 4 January it condemned the ongoing incursion into Gaza by Israel and urged an immediate end to military actions by all concerned. On 9 January India issued yet another statement on the situation in Gaza, calling for an early end to the suffering of the people of Gaza and a return to a dialogue and resumption of the peace process. The Communist parties and the regional parties in India singled out the Israeli operation in Gaza for criticism, as did Prime Minister Singh, who strongly condemned Israel's operation in Gaza, which, he said, had led to the needless loss of many innocent lives. These five official statements, as well as the Indian media criticism, centred on the heavy destruction and civilian casualties in Gaza. The Indian stand can be considered sober and balanced, in light of two

interpretations of the Indian position: first, for New Delhi there was only one Palestinian leadership, that of Mahmud Abbas, who remained silent when the Gaza Strip was literally on fire. Second, the Indian left-wing parties had generally weakened and their withdrawal of support for the UPA government over the Indo–US nuclear agreement diminished their political influence (Kumaraswamy, 2009). Beyond the foregoing statements during the military operation in Gaza, India allocated \$1 million to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and in October 2009 India resolved to increase its contribution to UNRWA by an additional \$1 million following Abbas's meeting with Singh at the 15<sup>th</sup> summit of the NAM in July 2009.

The collapse of the Oslo process at Camp David; the death of the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat; the ending of the second Intifada (April 2003); the election of Abbas as the new PA leader; the introduction of the roadmap and the failure of its implementation; the Israeli disengagement from Gaza; the Second Lebanon War; the Arab peace initiative (the “Saudi Arabian Peace Plan”) and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza—all influenced Indian policy on the Israel–Palestinian conflict. The UPA government had particularly supported the roadmap approach, while taking a positive view of the Israeli Gaza disengagement in summer 2005 and the Arab peace initiative (Israel accepted the outline of the roadmap but had reservations about certain aspects).<sup>21</sup> Since 2004 the UPA governments have expressed their will to

---

21 The Roadmap, which is a performance-based plan for a permanent two-state solution – Israel and Palestine – to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, was presented by US President George W. Bush and officially published by the USA, Russia, the EU and the UN (“The Quartet”) in April 2003 as an outline to renew the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The first phase of the roadmap refers to the end of terror and violence against Israel and the normalization of the situation on the Palestinian side, which will be followed by Israel’s withdrawal from the Palestinian territories taken over since the beginning of the second Intifada (September 2000) and a freeze of all Israeli settlement activities on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Phase two focuses on efforts to establish a Palestinian state with provisional borders. Phase three includes an international conference to discuss and work out a permanent status agreement between the two countries (*Reuters*, 30 April 2003).

maintain India's relations with Israel, especially military cooperation, but have demonstrated clearly that India's ties with Israel will not affect its relations with the Arab world and its traditional support for the Palestinian cause.

## **India Israel relations on the level of national system: politics, society, and individuals**

In addition to the analysis of relations on the level of the international system, and based on the Levels of Analysis model, relations are also analysed on the national level, in terms of politics, society and individuals.

### **Indian political system**

Since the 1990s Indian politics has undergone a period of transformation: from emphasis on socialism and local politics to a strong emphasis on a modern economy and new economics. The Congress party, which once symbolized the architecture of the Non-Aligned Movement and India's state socialism, led India to its economic reforms and to economic liberalization.

The two United Front governments that succeeded the Congress government continued with economic reforms while accommodating the new global realities. The NDA governments that followed were less inhibited by the traditional ideological inheritance of Indian foreign policy and were therefore more open to economic reforms. The Congress party, which returned to power in 2004, has sustained the processes of liberalization and globalization.

The changing economic orientation in Indian politics since the 1990s has also found expression in Indian foreign policy, notably in its view of Israel. The new policy is more suitable for meeting the challenges of the 21st century, shifting from idealism to pragmatism (Mohan 2003). Gradually and in addition to the governmental build-up of official relations with Israel, the Indian political system has come to terms with the evolving relations between the two countries. Between 1992 and 2005 all the governing parties, and most of the other political parties in India, came to realize that the success of Indian foreign policy depended on the pace of India's globalization and its ability to strengthen its ties with the West. Israel, as a

modern technology-oriented economy, has become an important economic partner of India in trade, joint ventures and the transfer of expertise and technology. The creation of diplomatic relations with Israel has won the approval of most of India's political spectrum, and the political parties have largely come to terms with the bilateral relationship, realizing its benefit for India, especially the defence and military aspects; at the same time, support for the Palestinian cause continues. The return to power of the Congress party on 23 May 2004 completed a political cycle as regards relations with Israel. Some concerns were expressed in Israel about possible changes in India's policy towards Israel; however, military, economic and cultural relations have been maintained, although political relations, especially in terms of high-level official visits, are less prominent.

On the political level of analysis, the various governments in India that took power after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel have to date been coalitions, and have had a direct influence on the Indian foreign policy.

### **United Front (UF) governments**

After the change of governments in India in June 1996 there was some concern in Israel that the new United Front (UF) coalition, led by the Janata Dal party and headed by the new Prime Minister Deve Gowda (1 June 1996 – 20 April 1997) would downgrade the relations between India and Israel. Later there was deeper anxiety that his successor, Prime Minister Indir Kumar Gujral (22 April 1997 – 18 March 1998), would indeed be inimical to them.

This anxiety arose from Gujral, formerly India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union and twice (under PM Chandra Sekhar and PM Deve Gowda) as a Minister of External Affairs, being considered a classic Nehruvian, but Prime Minister Gujral adapted to the new global realities, while expanding the integration of India's economy with the rest of the world, and the Israeli concern about him proved unjustified.

In terms of Indian politics the UF governments failed to win a solid majority in the parliament, and Gowda and Gujral were often unable to control their coalition partners, which necessitated a continuous search for new political allies while producing two notably weak governments, concentrating more on domestic politics. Recall that the first UF government came to power at the same time as the change of government in Israel (June 1996). The new Likud government was headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, who, as described by the former Indian secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, J.N. Dixit, was considered in India an extreme right-wing leader who had backed out of Israel's commitments to the Palestinians. Israel's concern about the UF governments turned out to be unjustified, and cooperation between the two countries during the UF government tenures continued, although it cooled off in terms of diplomatic practice such as high level official visits.

### **National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments**

In 1998 the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition to victory. The coalition was headed twice successively by Atal Behari Vajpayee (19 March 1998 to 23 May 2004). Vajpayee was traditionally, even before the establishment of diplomatic relations, a staunch supporter of Israel, and during his tenures India shed its inhibitions about dealing extensively with it. Under the NDA tenure relations between the two countries reached new heights, including official visits of India's Home Minister Krishna L. Advani in May 2000 and of Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh the next month. At Vajpayee's express instruction India refused to go along with the Arab and Islamic countries, despite their pleas and a visit by Arafat to New Delhi, in supporting a resolution once again equating Zionism with racism, at the UN-sponsored conference against racism in Durban in August 2001. In those years substantive cooperation between the two countries expanded, reaching its zenith with the visit of Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to India in September 2003. The visit concluded with an official joint statement on friendship and cooperation. Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom visited India in February 2004.

## **United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governments**

The formation after the May 2004 Indian general election of a new coalition government, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), by the Congress Party, led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (after the Congress party president, Sonia Gandhi, conceded the premiership), revived Israel's concern. It was feared that based on its shared elements the coalition, which included the Indian communist parties, would adversely affect India's policy on Israel. However, the new government headed by the pragmatic economy-oriented Singh, was determined to continue the path of friendly relations between the two countries, realizing their benefits for both; at the same time, it aimed at improving its relations with the Arab countries. Recall that the decision to establish full and normal relations with Israel was made in 1992 by Prime Minister Rao, who headed the Congress Party and that the current Prime Minister Singh was the Finance Minister in Rao's government, and the architect of India's economic liberalization.

The return to power of the Congress party closed a political cycle, and relations with Israel won the backing of most of the political spectrum in India. The political parties largely perceived the benefits to be gained, with the added value of Israel to India particularly in the military field, yet without forgoing their support for the Palestinian cause or their friendly relations with the Arab world. In sum, for international and national reasons, the new UPA government wanted to improve its relationship with the Arab world and to be portrayed as a staunch supporter of the Palestinians and their quest for an independent state, in contrast to the NDA and the BJP in particular, which were perceived as pro-Israeli.

## **Pressure groups**

Pressure groups in the form of small lobbies in society that promote a certain foreign policy are common in democracies. Israel and India are both democracies, but pressure groups have traditionally played a minor role

in the two countries in the formulation of foreign policy. The US Jewish organizations could be considered an exception due to their collective function as a powerful external group exerting pressure on India.

### *US Jewish lobby*

The Indian leadership as well as Indian prime ministers are aware of the potential of the American Jewish lobby and its ability to exert vital influence on American policy making as well as American finance. When Prime Minister Rao visited the USA at the end of January 1992, a few days after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, his meeting in New York on 1 February 1992 with representatives of the American Jewish organizations was cordial. The two sides discussed possible cooperation between India and the American Jewish community (Yegar 2004). Since 1995 the American Jewish Committee (AJC) has sent several delegations to India and it has brought a group of American leaders of Indian origin to visit Israel as well. An AJC conference was held in New Delhi in 1997 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of independence of both India and Israel. The pro-Israel and pro-India lobbyists also worked together successfully to gain the approval of the Bush administration for Israel to sell Falcon AWACS and Israel's Arrow ballistic missile defence system to India:

The Indian leadership became increasingly convinced that the American Jewish lobby provides a vital link of influence in American policy making and finance (Kumar 2001).

The coalition of the two lobbying groups included the US-India Political Action Committee (USINPAC), the American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) and the AJC (Singh 2003).<sup>22</sup>

An AJC delegation visited New Delhi in January 2004, and India's Prime Minister Singh met the leaders of the AJC in September 2004 when he

---

22 India's former Ambassador to Jordan, Romania, Senegal, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

visited New York. On that occasion he praised their contribution to India–US relations as well as the Israeli–Indian friendship.

According to Ephraim Inbar (2004), New Delhi believed that upgrading its relations with Jerusalem would have a positive effect on the attitude of the US towards India:

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Institute on National Security Affairs, and the American Jewish Congress nourish ties with India and with the Indian Lobby in Washington. Many members of the US–India Political Action Committee, which was formed only in September 2002, are blunt about their desire to emulate American Jewish groups and are interested in building a long-term relationship (Inbar 2004).

In recent years the Jewish-Indian alliance in the US has been instrumental by joining forces to defeat those whom they perceive as antagonistic to both Israel and India. The two countries' lobbies have worked together on a number of domestic and foreign affairs issues, such as hatred, crimes, immigration, anti-terrorism legislation and backing pro-Israel and pro-India candidates in the political arena.

### *Indian community in Israel*

The Immigration of the Indian Jews to Israel started with the establishment of Israel in 1948, when they joined Israeli settlers in building the country. The Jews of India in Israel are organized into communities throughout the country under the central organization of Indian Jews in Israel. In 1992 the Israel–India Cultural Association was established to promote cultural relations between the two countries.

The Jews of India retain their pride in their Indian heritage, expressing gratitude to Mother India for the treatment they received in their native country where they were never exposed to anti-Semitism (Weil 2002). They are active in various sectors of the Israeli industry and agriculture, and

many have attained high positions in the army, politics, media, sports and culture. The Bnei-Israel (“Children of Israel”) community preserve their local mother tongue, Marahti, in Israel.<sup>23</sup> An international conference for Marahti speakers was held in October 1996 in Israel with more than 500 representatives from all over the world. Among them were Manohar Joshi, former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, and Sharad Pawar, former Minister of Defence as well as former Chief Minister of Maharashtra (Massil 2002). The central organization concentrates on education and culture, and it is not actively involved in Israeli national politics. However, the Indian community constitutes a bridge between the two nations’ cultures and in terms of people to people. In fact, both countries attach a great deal of importance to their mutual cultural relations.

### *Friendship societies in India*

More than 50 societies and associations promoting people-to-people friendship between India and Israel can be found in different parts of India, including the Shalom Alumni clubs of the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Centre for International Cooperation (MASHAV). The Shalom club of Bombay (Mumbai) has been particularly active in professional and social activities in the State of Maharashtra and among its many activities have been workshops on topics ranging from AIDS prevention education to the organization of events such as fund-raising for homeless children. The Shalom clubs have not been involved in India’s politics and have not played a role as a pro-Israeli pressure group. However, the Shalom clubs contribute to Israel’s image in India.

### *Muslim community in India*

The overwhelming majority of the Indian Muslim community (about 140 million) have been staunch supporters of the Palestinian cause with

---

23 The largest of India’s Jewish communities that emigrated from the State of Maharashtra to Israel; over 50,000 Bnei Israel reside in Israel.

---

a traditional anti-Israeli attitude, as expressed by some protesters from Muslim organizations in New Delhi against the visit of Prime Minister Sharon to India. Indian Muslims have constantly articulated the view that India, regardless of the changes in international politics since the end of the Cold War, should sustain its earlier pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy, as well as its Nehruvian tradition. The Indian Muslim community has been a political factor to be reckoned with especially since the Indian political system became transformed into a kind of coalition government after the 1990s. In fact, after the new UPA coalition government was formed by the Congress party in May 2004, the level of expectation of the Indian Muslim community regarding a change of foreign policy on Israel was high (it was also supported by the old guard of the Congress party as well as left-wing political parties). However, regardless of the Congress party's criticism while in opposition of the previous NDA governments' efforts to promote Israeli-Indian ties, which they regarded to be at the expense of the Palestinians, the new UPA government sent a clear message to the Muslim community in India through the Minister of Defence Pranab Mukherjee. That message declared that relations with Israel, particularly military cooperation, would be maintained (Pant 2005). Israel has tried to improve its relations with the Indian Muslim community by inviting some of its leaders to visit in Israel in August 2007. They met the Foreign Minister Tsipi Livni, the two Chief Rabbis, and the Israeli President. However, the India's Muslims and their organizations, supported by the left-wing parties, continue to object to the evolving Indian-Israeli relations.

### *Indian media*

Israel's image in the Indian media underwent a change for the better after 1992. In March 2004 *The National Herald*, considered the Congress party's voice, referred in an editorial to India-Israel relations as a strategic imperative; Indian military procurement from Israel, the dialogue on counter-terrorism, and a useful high-tech deal served the national Indian strategic interest (*National Herald*, 10 March 2004). However, the Israeli image

suffered a blow following the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and operation Cast Lead in 2009, when many of the media expressed their support for the Palestinian people.

## Conclusion

Prior to Israel's independence and then from 1948 to 1991, India's policy on Israel reflected its traditional sympathy with the Arabs, and with the Palestinians in particular. It also accorded with India's national interests in the Middle East region (West Asia) and its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). That early policy was particularly influenced by its complex relations with Pakistan, the conflict over Kashmir and the sentiments of the Indian Muslims. Israel, on the other hand, viewed this as a hypocritical stance, and its approach to India ran the gamut from expectancy to hope, disappointment, dismay, anger, and ultimately indifference. In 1992 a significant diplomatic change occurred when India and Israel established full diplomatic relations imbued with strategic importance for both. As a feature of its diplomatic activism from the 1990s, India shifted to a pragmatic policy on Israel, which encompassed convergent strategic interests yet without ignoring India's economic and political interests in the Middle East. Successive Indian governments since 1992 have exerted a variable influence on policies on Israel. Under the governments headed by the BJP (1998-2004) the relations between the two countries reached new heights. The change of governments in India in May 2004, with the return to power of the Congress party, brought about an improvement in India's relations with the Arab world. The UPA governments were eager to demonstrate that ties with Israel would not affect their support for the Palestinian cause, while perceiving that sound relations with Israel were of strategic value to India. India's policy on Israel is expressed in pragmatic and controlled diplomacy. Israel, grasping the growing importance of India in the international system and taking their bilateral relations as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, engaged in flexible diplomacy with India. Despite the cooling relationship after 2004, the evolving bilateral relations between India and Israel, particularly their military cooperation, can be described as pragmatic, centring on their convergent strategic interests.

## Selected Bibliography

Avimor, S. (ed.). 1991. *Relations between Israel and Asian and African States: A Guide to Selected Documentation*. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Maor-Wallach Press, Jerusalem.

Brecher, M. 1963. *The New States of Asia*. Oxford University Press, London.

Cohen, P. S. 2001. *India – Emerging Power*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC.

Dixit, J. N. 1996. *My South Block Years*. UBSPD, New Delhi.

Eytan, W. 1958. *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

Gerberg, I. 2005. Contemporary Indo–Israeli Relations: Induced Oscillated Diplomacy. *Paper read at the conference on the Indo-Israeli Partnership: Exploring Strategic and Economic Potential*, 9 June 2005, Tel Aviv University.

Gerberg, I. 2009. *The Changing Nature of Israeli-Indian Relations: 1948-2005*. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Inbar, E. 2004. *The Indian-Israeli Entente*. Ramat Gan, Israel. The Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University.

Kapila, S. 2003. *Israeli–Indian Strategic Cooperation and Prime Minister Sharon’s visit: The Added Dimensions*. Paper 777, [www.saag.org/papers](http://www.saag.org/papers), South Asia Analysis Group, New Delhi.

Kumar, D. 2001. *India and Israel: Dawn of a New Era*, [www.westerndefence.org/bulletins/Dec-01](http://www.westerndefence.org/bulletins/Dec-01), Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence, Jerusalem.

Kumaraswamy, P. R. 1998. *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership*. Ramat Gan, Israel. The Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University.

---

Kumaraswamy, P. R. 1996. The Limitations of Indo Israeli Military Cooperation. *Contemporary South Asia*, 5(1).

Mohan, C. R. 2005. Rethinking India's Grand Strategy. in N. S. Sisodia and C. Uday Bhaskar (eds.), *Emerging India*, Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, India.

Naaz, F. 2000. Indo-Israeli Cooperation: Agriculture, Trade and Culture. *Strategic Analysis*, XXIII (6).

Naaz, F. 1999. Indo-Israeli Military Cooperation. *Strategic Analysis*, XXIV (5).

Pant, V. H. 2005. *India Israel Partnership: Convergence and Constraints*. Paper 1279, [www.saag.org/papers](http://www.saag.org/papers), South Asia Analysis Group, New Delhi.

Riaz, H. (ed.). 2006. *India Israel in Focus*. Krest Publications, New-Delhi, India.

Yegar, M., Govrin, Y., and Oded, A. (eds.). 2002. *Ministry for Foreign Affairs: The first fifty years* (Part I). Keter Press, Jerusalem (in Hebrew).

Yegar, M. 2004. *The Long Journey to Asia*. Haifa: University of Haifa (in Hebrew).

<http://www.mfa.gov.il>

<http://meaindia.nic.in>

<http://www.india-defence.com>

**Itzhak Gerberg is a former Consul-General of the State of Israel in Bombay (Mumbai) and former Ambassador to Zimbabwe. He is presently the Ambassador of Israel to Georgia.**

**He holds a PhD in International Politics from the University of South Africa, and his doctoral research focused on India-Israel relations. He obtained his MA degree in Political Science from Haifa University and was an instructor at the Israel National Defense College (INDC). Dr. Gerberg has been a lecturer at Tel Aviv University and a Research Fellow at the Israel National Defense College Research Centre.**

