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***Theoretical Paper***

# India-Israel Relations: Opportunities and Complexities



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## Abstract

India and Israel share a rich civilizational history that began with the coming of Jews to India in 562 BCE and an identical colonial past being colonized by the British Empire. Together, they share a special association marked by several commonalities like both were born out of the bitter partition, practicing democratic ideals, subject to hostile neighbours, and rising cross-border terrorism. While India recognized Israel in 1950, it took four long decades for both to formally begin their diplomatic ties. The post-Cold War world order, the rise of coalition politics in India, and the successful dehyphenation of Indo-Israel ties from Indo-Palestine ties have further contributed to the increasing importance of the relationship. Today, the relationship, which was once founded on the bedrock of defense cooperation and arms trade, has become multifaceted. Both countries have converged across fields that include space, science, and technology, real estate, textile, cybersecurity, pharmaceuticals, agricultural innovations, water management, energy, etc. Along with convergences, there are also geopolitical divergences on the question of Palestine, Israel's critical view of India-Iran relations, India's sensitivities to Israel-China relations, etc. that have contributed to shaping the relationship. However, trust and pragmatism have never let the divergences overpower convergences in the relationship. A growing Indo-Israel tie is also seen as a boost to heightened Indo-US ties. This increased reconciliation between Israel and India is also expected to have wider implications for regional geopolitics and further shaping the strategic discourse of the region.

**Keywords:** *India; Israel; Geopolitics; Security; Palestine*

## Introduction

India realized the importance of Israel in its geopolitical and security discourse four decades after it recognized the state of Israel in 1950. Since then the

relationship has been marked by positivity and trust. Both countries share certain similarities that have helped to draw them close to each other like common law structure, democratic

practices, colonial past, civilizational linkage, etc. (Abhyankar, 2012). Several factors have helped to the maturing of this strategically important relations. First, Israel is one such few reliable friends of India that have stood behind her at times of crises, providing her with weapons and weapon launching systems that India would not have availed from any other country. Secondly, India has been successful in delinking its relations with Israel from that of Palestine, which many strategists believe is due to the lack of gains from a pro-Arab stand on the issue of Kashmir and exaggeration of Muslim sensitivity supplemented by the rise of right-wing politics in India. Moreover, in recent times India has been able to draw a similarity between its struggle against Pakistan sponsored terrorism and Israel's coping with Hamas sponsored terrorism. Third, both are subject to the hostile and nuclear-armed neighbourhood and radicalism emanating from international terror groups like Al Qaeda, ISIS, etc. Today along with the US, India, and Israel remain major targets of these terror groups. Fourth, India's talent and skill complement Israeli innovation and technology. These have made possible collaborations across the fields of science and technology, space, medicines, nanotechnology, etc... The

relationship has also provided India access to state-of-the-art Israeli military hardware, aviation electronics, wastewater management system, desalination systems, farming practices, cyber-security, etc... The relationship is also characterized by major geopolitical differences. The end of the Cold War disintegrated the USSR, India's foremost strategic and diplomatic partner, and provided the opportunity to the US to unilaterally manage the Middle Eastern politics. The rise of the US was surely a bonus for Israel (Inbar, 2006). The issues of Palestine, India's relation with Iran, Israel-China compatibility, etc. continue to be the stinging point in this burgeoning relationship. It can be argued that the above factors have contributed to building a robust partnership setting aside these differences. As Netanyahu stated in 2017, "I believe the formula for success is simple: it's I2 T2. That equals – Indian talent times Israeli technology. It equals Israel-India's ties for tomorrow. I2 T2. This is the degree of mathematics I remember from my student days" (The Wire, 2017, para. 6). The paper aims to understand these convergences and divergences that continue to shape this 'all-weather' partnership.

## Trends in Relationship

India's political association with Israel can be traced even before the birth of Israel as a sovereign nation. India was one of the members of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), constituted to resolve the demands of the Palestinians and the Israelis. The committee came up with two proposals in September 1947. The first one was known as the 'Majority Plan' which recommended the partition of Palestine into two independent states of Israel and Palestine with an economic union. The second plan or the 'Minority Plan', on the other hand, stressed on creating a federal Palestine with an autonomous Jewish region. India was opposed to the idea of partition along religious lines as advocated by the Majority Plan due to its own aggrieved experience of partition and also out of the fear of a revival of Islamic radicalism, therefore supported the Minority Plan when put to vote in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Three factors helped to shape India's engagement with Israel in the early years. First, the issue of the domestic minority population in India which was very much sympathetic towards Palestine. Newly independent India's attempt to portray itself as a

secular country depended heavily on this aspect. Second, India's proximity to the Arab World also resisted India from recognizing Israel. Third, Nehruvian India stressed on the principle of anti-colonialism and regarded Israel as an offshoot of colonialism. These three factors formed the basis of its engagement with Israel until the end of the Cold War.

Israel became a sovereign state in 1948 but was formally recognized by India in 1950. The Indian government under Nehru was skeptical about India's full-fledged engagement with Israel. The recognition of Israel by Islamic countries like Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, etc. helped India to justify her recognition of the Zionist state. Nehru was also disturbed by the Arab World's interference in Indian policy towards Israel and growing closeness between the Arab bloc and Pakistan. Israel opened its first consulate in India in 1953. Cold War politics further contributed to the already strained relationship between India and Israel. Israel was perceived as an ally of the US and West. Nehru who wanted to project himself as the leader of the non-aligned world took this opportunity to criticize the Zionism as aggressive. The Arab Bloc within the Non-aligned

Movement (NAM) was instrumental in calling for the global isolation of Israel. During the Suez Crisis of 1956, India opposed Israel's invasion of Egypt. The loss of lives of the Indian soldiers, part of the United Nations Emergency Force, in the Arab-Israel war of 1967 further enraged India. As a result, India supported the UN Security Council resolution that directed Israel to release the annexed territories of West Bank and East Jerusalem and move to its pre-1967 borders. The period of 1948 to 1992 saw India as a vehement critic of Israel. However, amidst the geopolitical tensions that existed between India and Israel until 1992, some bilateral progress also witnessed. The visit by Israeli Foreign Minister Sharett to India in 1956 and then by Foreign Minister Dayan in 1977. Also, during the 1962 war against China and the 1965 War against Pakistan, India procured advanced weapons from Israel which was denied to it by the Western World. There were also reports of collaboration between the intelligence agencies of both countries – Research and Analysis Wing (India) and Mossad (Israel). India also showed interest in Israeli techniques of dryland farming and drip irrigation. Also, from the late 1980s, engagements in the field of technology commenced. The most successful of all

engagement was the trading of diamonds.

In 1992, four decades after India recognized Israel, a full diplomatic relationship was established. Several factors contributed to this change of policy. First, the rise of coalition politics, the threat to national security emanating from Pakistan sponsored terrorism, and the disintegration of the USSR contributed to India's policy drift in engaging with Israel. The Indian political spectrum, with the rise of BJP and other right-wing parties, got bifurcated on the issue of ties with Israel. The liberalization policy that the Narshima Rao government adopted for the economic development of India made engagement with Israel inexorable. The Arab-Israel peace process facilitated by the US and the Soviet and the 1993 Oslo Accord between Israel and Palestine, came as a blessing in disguise for India. Furthermore, India's multifaceted interests in the Middle East required its participation in the multilateral track known as the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), resulted from the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 co-sponsored by the US and the USSR. Second, the pro-Pakistan stand adopted by the Arab World since the early 1990s

and the continuous criticism of India by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) made India drift from its traditional warmth with the Arab Bloc and evolve stronger ties with Israel. Third, India was increasingly becoming a victim of cross-border terrorism and non-conventional warfare emanating from Pakistan and required sophisticated defense technologies to deal with this problem. India was highly attracted by Israeli weaponry and wanted to strengthen the already existing defense ties. The Kargil war of 1999 was a game-changer for Indo-Israel ties. During the war, Israel provided India with advanced weaponry despite western pressure. This act of Tel Aviv increased its acceptance among the Indians. In 2003, Prime Minister Sharon visited India agreements on trade and technology were formalized. In 2005, the joint Industrial Initiative for research and development (R&D) was signed and an agreement on economic cooperation was also finalized. In 2007, an agreement was signed between MASHAV (Israel) and ICRISAT (Government of Telangana). In 2014, both countries signed a Mutual Legal Assistance treaty for homeland security. The relationship gained momentum with the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and Prime

Minister Netanyahu on the sidelines of UNGA in 2014 in New York. Under the First NDA regime, India successfully delinked its relation with Israel from that of Palestine marking a major shift in its policy towards West Asia. In 2015, much to the dismay of Palestine, India abstained from voting against Israel in United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). In 2015, the President of India Pranab Mukherjee visited Tel Aviv followed by the visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister (late) Sushma Swaraj in 2016. Israeli President Rivlin visited India in 2016 during which MoUs on water management and agricultural cooperation was signed. In 2017, the Indian Air Force (IAF) participated in Blue Flag Exercise in Israel. The most crucial diplomatic event occurred also in the same year when Prime Minister Modi visited Tel Aviv. He became the first Indian Prime Minister to do so. This mega event in bilateral relations was complimented by the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in 2018 to India. Today both countries have diversified their area of engagement ranging across almost every possible aspect from space to agriculture. Despite their geopolitical differences, they have become successful in

evolving an “all-weather partnership” based on trust and pragmatism.

## **Convergence of Interests**

### **Economy and Energy**

India-Israel economic synergy ranges across different business sectors that include biotechnology, medicine, life science, nanotechnology, clean energy, water management, etc. Israel’s research and development institutions find a suitable commercial market for its innovations and technologies in India. Diamond constitute the bulk of trade between the two nations. Diamonds from Israel are exported to India for cutting and polishing which helps in increasing its market value. While diamond continues to be the primary commodity of trade but in recent years it has further diversified to include chemical products, textiles, potash, etc. The volume of merchandised products increased from US\$ 200 million in 1992 to US\$ 5.19 billion in 2011. Israel has been investing in the development of Indian real estate, dairy farming, hospitals, etc. sectors. Indian is the third-largest trading partner of Israel in Asia and the eighth-largest globally. Together they

have also collaborated to meet their interest by investing in third-country markets like South Sudan, Vietnam, etc. Bilateral trade volume has increased from US\$ 3.3 billion in 2007-2008 to US\$ 6.6 billion in 2011-2012 (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2016). India proposed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two to further elevate the volume of trade given the vast areas of future collaborations. Until 2013, FDI flow from Israel to India was about US\$ 73.7 million. In 2014, Israel import from India stood at US\$ 2.3billion while India imported US\$ 2.2 billion. Israel’s imports from India have raised by 9.92 percent while India’s import from the later has increased by 6.36 percent between 2005-2015 (MEA, 2016). As of 2018, bilateral trade stands at US\$ 5.84 billion. TATA Consultancy Services (TCS) began operation in Israel since 2005 and the State Bank of India opened its branch in 2007. Engel Invest of Israel is involved in real estate projects in Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and other states. Israel’s Big Shopping Malls have opened the Big Thane-Mumbai Shopping Mall on the outskirts of Mumbai. India’s Yes Bank collaborated with Poalim Capital Markets for India-Israel Cross-Border Investment Banking (Abhyankar, 2012).

*Table 1: India-Israel Bilateral Trade (in US \$ Millions) From 2005 – 2013*

|                 | 2005   | 2006   | 2007   | 2008   | 2009   | 2010   | 2011   | 2012   | 2013   |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| India's Export  | 1276.3 | 1433.3 | 1688.8 | 1648.8 | 1157.4 | 1845.6 | 2154.5 | 1936.3 | 2121.9 |
| Israel's Export | 1224.2 | 1270.4 | 1606.7 | 2361.3 | 1810.9 | 2901.6 | 3036.4 | 2509.3 | 2271.8 |
| Total Trade     | 2500.5 | 2703.7 | 3295.5 | 4010.1 | 2968.3 | 4747.1 | 5190.9 | 4445.6 | 4393.7 |

(Source: Indian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014 and Ministry of Economy and Industry, Government of Israel, 2014)

In terms of energy resources, India is a big market for crude oil, hydrocarbons, and other petroleum products. 45 percent of India's energy requirements are met by hydrocarbons and coal. Israel on the other hand has evolved its capacities to explore oil and energy through offshore drilling. It has under the possession world's third-largest reserves of shale that reduce its energy dependence (Kumar, 2014). Israel has also undertaken the objective of decarbonizing its energy necessities and move towards clean energy. India can greatly benefit by cooperating in areas of green energy and meet its energy requirements. Joint ventures in areas of renewable energy like solar power, biomass, hydroelectricity, etc. will provide India with the opportunity to reduce dependence on conventional energy sources. Israel's innovative technologies will stand beneficial to help India meet its energy demands. Israel's Focal Energy committed for investments worth US\$ 20 million in India's energy sector and is involved in

developing 30MW biomass power plants in Rajasthan and 12MW hydroelectric power plant in Himachal Pradesh.

India can also use its experience of offshore exploration of oil by collaborating with Israel in the drilling of oil and gas from the Great Levant Basin in the east of the Mediterranean Sea. Considering the growing energy need of India, Israel can emerge as a possible alternative for India's energy security and an increased Indian investment or collaboration in Israel's energy sector will be mutually beneficial. Thus, greater cooperation in the energy sector can help boost the economy and energy security by many folds.

## Science and Technology

India and Israel share similarities in terms of their vast pool of research and development talent and initiatives which provides them with opportunities for



greater collaboration in areas of science and space technology. India is globally recognized and acclaimed for its big space programs at cheaper costs (e.g. India's Mars Mission was much cheaper than the Hollywood movie 'Gravity') and development of homegrown rockets for launching remote sensing, meteorological, and communication satellites. On the other hand, Israel has its expertise in areas of software development, telecommunications, high-resolution imaging capabilities, and semiconductor development. The first step towards the actualization of possible collaboration was formalized through the 1993 agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation. Since then India has been instrumental in launching many Israeli satellites. Further in 2005, an MoU was formalized on Industrial Research and Development Initiative and a joint fund i4RD was constituted to stimulate joint industrial projects. In 2008, under the joint space program, both countries launched the TecSAR satellite and paved the way for collaboration in developing India's next-generation satellite program Radar Image Satellite or RISAT-2 built by the Indian Space agency ISRO. In 2009, Israel helped India in the launching of border control imaging satellite which enabled the later

to tighten grip on border security vis-à-vis Pakistan and China. In 2014, the India-Israel cooperation fund was set up for scientific and technological collaborations. Indian business group TATA and Ramot, Tel Aviv University (Israel) have collaborated for generating commercial technologies in areas of engineering, pharmaceuticals, clean energy, etc. (MEA, 2016). India's Sun Pharma has also entered into a collaboration with Technion for research on drugs for oncology and with Weizmann for drugs on brain diseases. There is also an MoU on joint research projects in areas of advanced science and information technology and a protocol for cooperation in areas of science and technology. Israel's technological innovations also provide Indian companies to concentrate on profitable arbitrage opportunities. During Prime Minister Modi's maiden visit to Israel, MoU for joint Research and Development worth US\$ 40 million was signed between India and Israel. In 2018, India's Institute of Space Science and Space Technology (IISST) and Haifa's Technion-Israel Institute of Technology signed an agreement for cooperation in space studies and research for scientists and students under the exchange program. Moreover, Israel's ability to produce custom-made

technological solutions finds a greater market in India.

## Water and Agriculture

India faces a serious problem of water pollution mostly of its freshwaters resulting due to mismanagement of industrial effluents, urbanization, inefficient irrigation techniques, and other factors that have raised fears of acute water scarcity by 2025. There also exist disputes over the sharing of water with neighboring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. Moreover, the amount of property and agricultural loss that many of the Indian states suffer due to flooding has been a matter of serious concern. Given this situation, Israel can offer India with efficient technologies and innovative ideas for handling wastewater management and water conservation. In this regard in 2012, the Ministry of Urban Development, India showed the intention to cooperate with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour, Israel in water technology (Kumar, 2014). Israel has grown self-reliant due to its struggle for freshwater and has become an expert in the desalinization of salty sea waters from the Mediterranean Sea to meet its freshwater needs. Therefore, providing India with an opportunity to collaborate

with Israel to develop an alternative source of freshwater. Israel has also been helping its neighbors like Jordan to meet its water demands more so after the Syrian refugee crisis. Experts believe that this water diplomacy may help to build trust in the region. India is also a regular participant in Water Technology and Environment Control (WATEC), an annual event highlighting Israel's water and energy technologies (Abhyankar, 2012). India's Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Shekhawat represented India in the 8th edition of WATEC held in Israel. Israel's IDE Technologies in collaboration with Indian industries like Reliance, Essar Constructions, and Sanghi Industries are operating 23 desalination plants in India. Aqwise, another Israeli company is involved in sewage treatment and drinking water projects in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Other major Israeli companies involved in water technology, treatment, and management in India include Global Environmental Solutions (GES), Hakohav Valves, Bermad, etc.

Indian economy is an agriculture-driven economy and with its huge population density, there is always a burden to feed its masses. Israel has pioneered agricultural engineering and helping

India in its capacity-building program resulting in the improvement of crop production and farmer training. India has gained in the areas of horticulture, protected cultivation, micro-irrigation, canopy management, nursery management, etc. (MEA, 2016). India's Jain Irrigation has brought a 100 percent stake of the drip irrigation sprinkler from Israeli company NaanDan. There is also a bilateral action plan in place aimed at expanding cooperation to different states of India. Israel is also helping India in the dairy farming sector for a high yield of milk. Netafim, Sion, Plasson, Agrexco, Avshalom group, Maxximilk, Hazera Genetics, etc. are some of the major Israeli companies operating in the Indian agricultural sector.

## Defense and Security

Indo-Israel defense cooperation has been the silver lining of the bilateral relationship. India's pursuit of advanced defense weapons and modernization of its Russian made equipment in which Israel has considerable expertise has made the later a viable alternative for acquiring a sophisticated defense system. Israel also finds a big market for the selling of its defense apparatus in the form of the Indian military.

However, both have been cautious in their approach towards bilateral defense ties. India has its interest in the Arab world both economic and political, on the issue of Palestine, and a closer tie with Iran, a major source of petroleum and oil. Israel to do not want itself to be projected as an enemy of Pakistan and China. The costing of India's indigenously built defense mechanism and the inability of Russia to provide weapons on-time and at cheaper rates has made India search for other reliable partners like Israel. Israel ranks among the top five defense equipment suppliers to India. Major Israeli companies are involved in enhancing India's aging defense systems.

The defense cooperation ranges from anti-missile systems to night vision cameras, from advanced radar systems to UAVs. Israel is also present in India's list for acquiring destructive firepower, anti-IED, and military communication technology. During the India-Pakistan war of 1965, Israel provided India with M-58 160 mm mortar ammunition. Israel has contributed to upgrading India's Mig-27 fighter jets and the navy's Ka-25 anti-submarine helicopters and patrol choppers. Indian army has acquired Howitzer guns from Israel worth over

US\$ 1 billion. Together they have also collaborated for upgrading Russian made T-72 tanks by providing advanced fire-control systems and thermal imagers. The Indian Air Force has collaborated with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) for upgrading Mig-21 fighter jets by fitting laser-guided bombs. Soltam, an Israeli company is involved in upgrading India's Soviet-era 133 mm artillery guns and L-60 anti-aircraft guns. It has also invested in providing 155 mm self-propelled guns for the Indian army. India installed at Jamnagar Airbase in Gujarat - a specialized Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation System acquired from Israel in 1996. In the same year, two Dvora MK-2 patrol boats were built by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) at the cost of US\$ 10 million for India. Israel's Tadiran is helping India in developing military communications. Israel was among the few countries along with France and Russia that welcomed India's nuclear test in 1998. The security lapses along the Line of Actual Control (LOC) during the Kargil conflict of 1999 made India reconsider its border security arrangements. However, the Indian effort to develop indigenous UAVs for explorations and tactical operations along the border failed miserably. Israel is known for its

advanced UAVs and as a result, India has acquired tactical HERON unmanned air vehicles and 200 UAVs for high-altitude operations along with Super Dovra-class patrol vessels. These HERON UAVs are used by Indian forces to gather information. In 2009, India purchased 16 HERON drones worth US\$ 239 million. In 2016, India procured HERON TP-XP worth US\$ 400 million and ordered for Heron-1 long-endurance reconnaissance UAVs in 2019 (Pant, 2019). India's Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) have established a division in Hyderabad for maintenance and other services (Kumar, 2014). In 2018, Adani Defense (India) have collaborated with Elbit Systems (Israel) for the manufacturing of HERMES 900 male UAVs for all-weather terrains.

The Indian Air Force has brought Harpy missiles for silencing enemy radars along with Delilah II bombs, Crystal Maze bombs, Pechora III, Surface-to-Air missiles (SAM), and Popeye beyond visual range air-to-air missiles (Abhyankar, 2012). In 2003, the Indian Navy has fitted this Surface-to-Air Barak anti-missile systems on its warships. A total of US\$ 40 million deal was formalized for acquiring twenty

such Barak missiles. Israel has also provided India with advanced radar systems namely the Phalcon Airborne Warning and Controlling Systems (AWACS) which were integrated with Russian made Ilyushin-76 heavy transport aircraft. India has also brought the transportable phased-array long-ranged 'Green Pine' fire radars from Israel for tracking incoming missiles from a distance of 500kms. The Arrow-2 anti-ballistic missile system and the Phalcon were jointly manufactured by the US and Israel and thus required US approval for procurement. Apart from the Arrow-2, Phalcon, etc. radar systems, in 2003, the Indian Defense Ministry additionally brought radars worth US\$ 1.5 billion. Between 1999-2011, defense trade accounted for up to US\$ 11 billion. This growing volume of trade in defense was largely due to the greater efficiency and reliability of the Western weaponry over Russian made weaponry. Both countries also complement each other in terms of the joint production of armaments. Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) have collaborated for the modernization of the Indian Air Force's Russian made fighter jets. The up-gradation of the Indian Air Force's Mig-27 validates this argument. Both

these state-owned companies have co-manufactured Advanced light Helicopter (ALH) for the attack, intelligence gathering, and anti-tank and anti-submarine operations. India's Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has collaborated with Israel Military Industries (IMI) for manufacturing of Israeli designed 130 mm and 155 mm cargo projectiles, 122mm Grad cargo projectiles, 125 mm advanced tank ammunition, and cargo mortars (Inbar, 2006). Israel's RAFAEL Advanced Defense Systems provided India with the technology to manufacture Python-4 air-to-air missiles and SPIKE anti-tank missiles. By 2008 India has also acquired the Python-5 missiles that have been fitted to the Indian Air Force's jets like Mirage 2000, Jaguar, Sukhoi-30, Tejas, etc. along with the DERBY air defense system. During the 2019 Balakot airstrike, a Pakistani fighter jet was shot down by a DERBY. In 2008, the same company provided India with the SPYDER-MR defense system for the protection of vital infrastructure from air-borne attacks. In 2003, an agreement was finalized between NELCO (India), and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) for the development and production of defense electronic gadgets. Indian army has also brought Tavor assault rifles and Galil sniper

rifles for its covert RAW unit from Israel. Israel Weapon Industries (IWI) has provided India with human movement detecting sensors and hand-held thermal scanners for the former's armed forces. India has also brought RAFAEL made SPICE-2000 guided bomb and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) made the GRIFFIN bomb and placed an order for the same in 2019. India purchased 50 HAROP drones in 2013-14 and ordered 54 more HAROPS in 2019. In 2018, the Government of India approved the procurement of MRSAM worth US\$ 2.5 billion to be co-manufactured by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) under the Make-in-India initiative.

Three agreements have been formalized between Indian and Israel in 2014 for cooperation in homeland security, protection of classified materials, and legal assistance in criminal matters. There is also a Joint Working Group for counter-terror operations. Regular exchanges at the highest level of defense staff have further helped to boost the relations. In 2017, ties were upraised to a strategic partnership. In the same year, India became the largest customer of Israel in terms of buying

arms worth US\$ 715 million. Recently under the Make in India project, India's increasing of FDI cap from 49 percent (2014) to 74 percent (2020) in the defense sector has opened gates for broader collaboration with Israel. India can partner with Israel for cross investments by investing in Tel Aviv's programs in exchange for production lines of hardware for the Indian army (Kumar, 2014). Like Russia, India can also collaborate with Israel for investing in the joint production of defense equipment in India at cheaper costs.

*Table 2: Percentage Trend Indicator Values (TIV) of India's Arms Export*

|                | 1999-2008 | 2009-2018 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Russia         | 74.39     | 68.28     |
| United States  | 1.13      | 9.66      |
| Israel         | 6.77      | 8.48      |
| United Kingdom | 3.87      | 3.67      |
| France         | 2.37      | 3.54      |
| Others         | 11.46     | 6.37      |

*(Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2019)*

India's increasing demand and reliance on Israeli defense equipment is largely due to the latter's ability to supply ready-to-use technologies. The UAVs from Israel have increased India's surveillance capability and operational ability. Israel's export-oriented defense industries and their willingness to

collaborate with Indian companies complement Make in India and Make with India (Pant, 2019). The flexibility of Israeli weaponry and its expertise to customize equipment has made its defense industry more acceptable among the buyers. India has been able to acquire advanced and sophisticated defense technologies which perhaps would not have been easy to acquire from other defense partners. Moreover, the fact that the US has allowed such transfer of technologies by the Israeli's to India cannot be ignored given Israel's dependence on the US for the development of state-of-the-art defense equipment and the growing strategic importance of the Indo-US partnership. All these culminate together to make Israel an "All Weather" defense partner for India (Pant, 2019). This strategic partnership is expected to grow given the changing discourse of global politics and also due to the converging interest of both India and Israel in terms of security enhancement.

On the security front, both countries have been subjected to common security concerns arising out of non-state actors. Also, the sequence of events that have unfolded in recent times in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries has been a

cause of concern for the Indian establishments. Added to these ambiguities in the region is India's energy security which is deeply embedded in the region and also the issue of a vast number of Indian labourers residing and working in these countries. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has been affecting both countries. The presence of Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), and state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan has made the situation far more complex. At the same time, pulling out of troops by the US from Afghanistan is expected to revive jihadi outfits in Kashmir and greater parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan putting the security aspect of the region under serious threat. Israel, on the other hand, is viewed by the global terror groups as a devil state which according to them has no right to exist. Apart from Hamas, ISIS, Al Qaeda, and their associates continue to attack Israel. This common menace of terrorism has made it more necessary for both Israel and India to collaborate on the security aspect. Both countries will have to evolve a mechanism by which they can counter the rising threat of radical Islamic fundamentalism without the possibility of a full-fledged war. For India, this becomes highly important as Pakistan is

a nuclear state and has often threatened a nuclear attack when dominated militarily by the Indian army (Kumar, 2014). As the modes of warfare are changing with time India and Israel, therefore, should try to choke the supply line of these terror outfits and help each other through the sharing of vital pieces of information and intelligence and upgrading of defense equipment in which India continues to be benefitted by Israel. Also, in this technocratic age, both countries must seek to cooperate against rising cyber warfare and evolve cyber mechanisms to prevent hacking and phishing of data.

## Geostrategic Divergence

### Palestine Question

India's involvement in the Palestine question can be traced to the days of colonialism. It was in the 1920s when Gandhi first called for Indian support on the Palestinian issue and since then India continues to support the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its demand for the separate state of Palestine. Both India and West Asia were subjected to European Colonialism and post-independence they found merit in supporting India's call for non-alignment. It must be noted that the

founders of the Non-Aligned Movement or NAM demanded the creation of an independent Palestine and India played a pivotal role in concentrating NAM's focus on Palestine. In 1980, India became the first country to recognize and legitimize Yasser Arafat's government in Palestine. In 1988, then Indian Minister of State for External Affairs K. K. Tiwari argued that the basic issues of peace in West Asia were rooted in the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and that all the states in the region including Israel have the right to peaceful existence within legally recognized borders (Abhyankar, 2012). On the other hand, India has always rejected the idea of equating Zionism with racism and maintained this stand by supporting UN resolutions since 1975. In 1998, India supported a UN resolution to allow Palestine to participate in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) sessions and in all such conferences and proceedings that took place under the umbrella of the United Nations. Since 1991, India has been a part of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and participated in the group's proceedings related to regional economic development, security and arms control, environment, and water resources. However, India was not seen as a party



to the Quartet either by Israel or by Palestine that was formed for facilitating the peace process post-1991. India too kept itself away from participating in the MEPP thereafter largely due to its fear of a quid pro quo by its opponent countries on the issue of Kashmir. Later in 2007, India was invited as a participant to the Anaheim conference. India has always voiced for peaceful settlement of the conflict between Israel and Palestine and supported the Wye River Memorandum (1998) and the Sharm-el-Sheik Agreement (1999) agreed by Israel and Palestine. The vast Muslim population of India may also be asserted as a reason for continued support for the PLO and Palestine state by subsequent Indian governments. India has supported several development projects in Palestine like the construction of the library-cum-activity centre in Deir-al-Balah college and Al-Azhar college in Gaza. It has also supported Palestine's candidature to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Israel-Palestine relations have direct implications on Indo-Israel bilateral engagements. There has always been a significant difference in approach between a Congress-led Indian

government and a BJP-led Indian government towards Israel and Palestine. Unlike the BJP, the Congress has always been more Pro-Palestine but every subsequent Indian government since 1992 has attempted to strengthen ties with Israel. Moreover, stable West Asia is also crucial for India's energy security in the region. India has supported the Arab Peace Plan of establishing the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its Capital and recognizing Israel based on its pre-1967 borders (Abhyankar, 2012). India has always stressed for bilateral settlement of the dispute between Israel and Palestine which it considers is purely political and can be settled through dialogue.

India's relationship with Israel has also not been subject to criticism by the Gulf countries and other West Asian countries given their pessimistic view of Israel. This is largely due to the big energy market that India provides to the Gulf nations. Moreover, India's positive role in the peace process has further contributed to its image building among the West Asian countries. Indian has been successful in balancing its support for the Palestine cause and its growing defense and security ties with Israel. The leadership in Palestine seeks to

utilize India's rapprochement with Israel as a way of achieving their demands and consider India as the most important contributor to the Israel-Palestine peace process. However, the rise of Hamas in Palestine has brought about a tectonic shift in the Israel-Palestine relations. The division of Palestine between the Hamas-led Gaza strip and Abbas-led Palestine Authority has further complicated the situation. The non-recognition of Hamas by the US and Israel has failed the idea of creating two states with secure borders and a considerable increase in violence between Israel and Palestine. The recent shift of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and considering the later as the capital of Israel has further failed the Middle East Peace Process. In recent years India continues to reject any anti-Israel resolutions and has significantly moved away from its non-aligned resolutions. A sharp change in India's position was also witnessed when Indian Prime Minister Modi did not visit Ramallah or meet the Palestinian leaders during his first official visit to Tel Aviv in 2017. The current Indian government is also believed to be much for accommodative towards Israel and has successfully delinked India-Israel relations from the India-Palestine relations.

## Vis-à-vis CHINA

China and India are regarded as the architect of the Asian Century but the realization of such a goal would require both to cooperate and prosper economically, politically, and socially. However, in reality, what exists is a serious trust deficit resulting due to repeated border incursions, Chinese policies to contain India's rise and its proximity to Pakistan. The rise of military China and its werewolf foreign policies have raised deep concerns within India. In recent times China's CPEC project (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), which involves Chinese investments in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), the Dokhlam border incursion in 2017, and the ongoing Galwan valley conflict have further deteriorated the already tensed relations. As John Mearsheimer predicted 20 years ago that the rise of China and its attempt to attain hegemony over Asia would result in an intense security crisis in Asia. China aims to become a regional hegemon (Papageorgiou, 2018) in Asia and as a part of it, is unilaterally attempting to change the status quo of its borders with neighbouring countries like Taiwan, India, Japan, etc., changing the status quo of the South China Sea

and the East China Sea, and so on. This has resulted in a possible security dilemma within the Asian continent. From the Israeli perspective, China along with India are big markets for its technologies and innovations. The two countries are involved in deep economic relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Israel in 1992. By 2012, China became Israel's second-largest foreign market. For China, relations with Israel provide it with a perfect chance to meddle in the Middle East affairs where it mostly has economic and energy needs. Moreover, the Chinese model of economic development is much applauded by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with which China maintains good economic ties. Militarily though China and Israel have not been able to engage much largely because of the latter's proximity with the US. A growing Sino-Israel relation is therefore a cause of concern for India given its geopolitical interest in the region. China though has a limited sphere of influence in West Asia, is believed to be a potential competitor to the US interests in the region. On the positive side, China is India's largest trading partner and greater involvement of China will help to downsize US hegemony over the region. Moreover, a possible Sino-India

collaboration along with Israel may pose huge strategic and security significance and open possibilities for greater collaborations in the fields of infrastructure, agriculture, defense, water, and energy.

## Recent Developments

India being one of the major victims of the COVID-19 has sought assistance from Israel in tackling the spread of the virus and improving its testing capability. India being the second-most populous country in the world faces the humongous challenge of conducting a rapid test for its citizens to keep a check on the spread of the virus. Israel even sent a team of Research and Development (DDR&D) to help India develop advanced testing facilities and kits and to conduct a test of Israeli technologies for the diagnosis of COVID-19. India has also stood behind its friend by continuing to supply raw materials and respiratory masks despite growing domestic requirements. In the words of Israel envoy for Asia-Pacific Gilad Cohen, "In this way, Israel and India successfully transformed this unprecedented global pandemic into an opportunity to assist one another and further enhance their relations" (as cited in Sukheja, 2020, para. 1). The Israeli

government's adoption of the Indian style of greetings - 'Namaste' and the Government of India's initiative of Janta Curfew to promote social distancing reflects the efficacy of India's soft power and has been regarded as 'No-Contact Diplomacy'. This also shows signs of a vibrant partnership that exists between India and Israel.

The Israelis have also shown interest in contributing to India's 'Atmahnirbhar Bharat' policy by willing to engage in collaboration with Indian firms. Israeli technology and India's manpower do complement each other. The opportunity for such collaborations extends from counter-terrorism to defense productions. Agreements worth Rupees 880 crore have been finalized for the purchase of light machine guns from Israel. The issue of the Free Trade Agreement is also a matter that is being increasingly stressed upon. Moreover, as India and China fight each other in eastern Ladakh, India's Raksha Mantri had a conversation with his Israeli counterpart stressing the need for urgent procurement of defense equipment and greater cooperation in joint production under the 'Make in India' project. India is under the process to acquire the Phalcon air defense system, smart air-

to-ground weapons, multi-mission drones, etc. from Israel to secure its sovereignty from Chinese aggression. Israel has also assured India of all possible help in the face of the ongoing conflict with China.

## Conclusion

The end of the 20th century was marked by a major change in the functioning of Indian polity. The beginning of coalition politics and the rise of right-winged politics contributed to a tectonic shift in the conduct of India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Israel and the Middle East as a whole. India's initial reluctance to engage with Israel was largely guided by the domestic minority factor, the Arab world, and the USSR's influence. However, the post-cold war global order and the rise of the US as the sole hegemon made it necessary for India to move closer to the Western world. India's liberalization policy also required greater engagement with the West to be successful. India was well aware of Israel's proximity with the West and hoped that enhanced relations with it would serve as a bridge to fulfil the gap that persisted. India also realized that the sentiment of its minority population concerning the Palestine issue was an exaggeration.

Ties with the Arab world to yielded nothing on the issue of Kashmir. Moreover, the security aspect also required India to procure advanced defense equipment and technologies.

The thrusts of Indo-Israel relations are rooted in several commonalities like both were subject to British colonialism, parliamentary democracies, have been subjected to terrorism, are subject to hostile neighbours, and are striving for economic development. The relationship is marked by the geostrategic significance that has far-reaching ramifications in a complex region. Israel viewed India's proximity with the Arab world as a chance to engage with its neighbours and legitimize its statehood that has been long denounced by the Arab states. For India, Israel provided the chance to modernize its backdated weaponry and advance its defense technology. Moreover, greater collaboration with India exposed Israel to wider Indian talent and a huge Indian defense market. Though initial trading was mostly dominated by Israel's export of diamonds, now both countries have expanded their field of engagement. In Israel, India found the scope of modernizing its Russian made weapons at lower prices and access to

sophisticated anti-tank missiles, laser-guided missiles, air-to-air missiles, UAVs, Howitzer guns, SPICE 2000 bombs, etc. Israel also provides India with the opportunity to collaborate with its defense industries for the joint production of defense equipment. Transfer of technology also became easier which India couldn't hope to acquire easily. High-level exchanges, the presence of large diaspora have also contributed to the concretization of the relationship. At present the range of this relationship is multifold. Israel has invested and collaborated with India in agricultural technologies, drip-sprinkler irrigation, wastewater management, space, telecommunication, textile industry, real estate, pharmaceuticals, etc. India's delinking of relations with Israel from that with Palestine has further boosted confidence in the relationship. It cannot be denied that transfer of defense technology from Israel had to be approved from the US as all such highly advanced technologies are either US-made or jointly produced by Israel with the US. In this regard, the role of the India-Israel lobby present in the US is extremely vital. They were successful in influencing the US to allow the transfer of advanced technologies defense equipment to India by Israel. Moreover,

this lobby also instrumental in influencing the US to pressurize Pakistan on the issue of the latter's sponsoring of terrorism in India. This closer cooperation has also given rise to the possibility of an Indian-US-Israel convergence on the issue of defense cooperation, joint manufacturing of modern technologies, countering global terrorism, etc.

Along with converging interests, there are also areas of divergence that shape the Indo-Israel relations. These divergences are largely the product of each other's geopolitical and geostrategic complexities. India sees Iran as a major source of its energy requirements and a gateway to its economic interest in Greater Central Asia. Israel has always been skeptical and critical of India's relations with Iran on the possibility of nuclear technology leak from India to Iran. While for India, Israel's closer ties with China in terms of economy and technology has been a major concern for its security aspect and poise challenge to India's geostrategic interests in the region. However, the strength of the Indo-Israel relationship is deeply embedded in mutual trust due to which these divergences could never overpower the diverse converging interests of the two and provides scope

for future up-gradation of this strategically important relationship.

## Disclosure Statement

The author declares that no potential conflict of interest exists.

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