

# India-Israel Relations: The Collaboration And Cooperation

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## **Abstract**

*India and Israel are the two oldest civilizations, India favours a multi-polar world where as Israel favour sauni-polar world. The official diplomatic relations between Israel and India were established in 1992. Their establishment ended a four decades period of only non-official relations between the countries. Despite its anti-Zionist and pro-Arab attitude, which was expressed in its reluctance to recognize the Jewish state, India eventually did recognized Israel in 1950. However, that recognition was not followed by a normalization of the relations between the states. Today India and Israel collaborate in defence, trade, strategic, and intelligence and security-related areas and the relationship is likely to become broader and more comprehensive over the long term, encompassing research, development and co-production in the defence sector, water resource management, science and technology, bilateral trade, and the non-defence sector. Based on a broad convergence of security, geopolitical and economic interests, this evolving partnership represents Delhi's shift from hostility towards the Jewish state to a more pragmatic and realistic approach.*

**Keywords:** *India; foreign policy; bilateral relations; security cooperation; defence collaboration; counter-terrorism cooperation*

## **Introduction**

Throughout the Cold War era India and Israel failed to forge a close bilateral relationship despite their many common values and traits: both are ancient civilisations which regained independence in an anti-imperialist struggle against the declining British Empire, producing the only working democracies in their distinctly non-democratic environments. With the end of this global conflict following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, Delhi abandoned its Cold War ideological paradigm carved by Jawaharlal Nehru, its first prime minister and long-time pre-eminent politician, adopting instead a realistic approach based on a pragmatic assessment of its national interests. As a result, relations with Israel evolved from outright hostility to a multifaceted and close cooperation.

## **Historical background**

India emerged as an independent nation on 15 August 1947 and Israel followed suit on 14 May 1948. Still, Delhi's ruling Congress Party found it difficult to reconcile itself to the advent of a Jewish state. Already at the United Nations' Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP) appointed to find ways and means to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict in Mandatory Palestine, India belonged to the minority group opposing the partitioning of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, alongside Iran and Yugoslavia, instead favouring a unified Arab-Jewish state. As the committee opted for the majority recommendation, Delhi voted against the 29 November partition resolution, as it did against Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1949. The following year, though, it recognized the Jewish state, and at the April 1954 South-East Asian prime ministers' conference in Colombo, Nehru refused 'to be a party to a resolution which stated that the creation of Israel was a violation of international law'.<sup>1</sup> Yet he refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with Jerusalem, apparently for fear that such a move would drive the Arab states to support Pakistan's attempt to have the Kashmir dispute moved from the Security Council to the General Assembly. While privately expressing sympathy for Israel,<sup>2</sup> as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Nehru positioned himself on the other side of the aisle, voicing strong support for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) established in 1964. Subsequently India became one of the first non-Arab states to recognize Palestinian self-proclaimed independence and also one of the first to allow an embassy of the PLO in its capital. The decision not to establish diplomatic relations

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with Israel was thus a combination of Delhi's Third World activism, the desire to neutralize Pakistani influence in the predominantly Muslim Arab world, and to safeguard uninterrupted supply of oil from the Gulf states.<sup>3</sup> In the early 1970s, however, some modest clandestine military and intelligence cooperation between the two countries ensued, as its wars against Pakistan convinced Delhi of Israel's strategic value for its national security.<sup>4</sup> Yet it was not until the demise of the Soviet Union, its strategic ally and foremost military supplier, that the change in international structure compelled India to revisit and redesign its foreign policy in order to place itself in the new emerging international order which was radically moving in a unipolar direction dominated by the US. India opened its economy and embarked on visits to/diplomatic efforts towards many nations to place itself in new international milieu. As the Soviet Union, India's strongest strategic ally and defence supplier, had waned in power and influence, New Delhi sought to engage with the sole superpower, the United States. Simultaneously, India reached out to the strategically important and powerful countries with which, during the Cold War period, because of either international dynamics or domestic compulsion, it had not been able to forge sound bilateral ties.

The majority of India's political establishment understood in the immediate post-Cold War period that it was imperative for India to build sound relations with the United States, the sole hegemonic power in the changed international system. Indian leaders came to assume that normalization with Israel would facilitate India's rapprochement with the United States, since they believed that the American Jewish lobby had a major influence on the foreign policy decisions of Washington. Indian Prime Minister Rao, in particular, was convinced that normalization with Israel was necessary to improve India's standing vis-à-vis the American Jewish community and the US political establishment.<sup>5</sup>

Amidst these international scenarios and perceptions India decided to change its earlier stance towards Israel and entered into diplomatic relationship with it. India was ready to rectify its West Asian policy distortion and inconsistency.

As a result, on 29 January 1992 India accorded full diplomatic recognition to Israel and both the nations established embassies in each other's countries. India entered into a strategic partnership with Israel for 10 years. Trips by Israeli officials to weigh the diplomatic and political mood in New Delhi culminated with the visit of Israel Deputy Director of Israel Foreign Ministry Moshe Yaegerin 1992.<sup>6</sup> Before 1992, India made the formal diplomatic relationship with Israel conditional on the solution of the Palestinian problem. However, this departure from the Cold War position in 1992 by the minority government led by Congress Prime Minister Narsimha Rao was a paradigm shift from Nehruvian anathema to a more practical and realistic approach. The relationship with Israel was no longer dependent on Palestinian independence. This was in line with the strategy that was being followed by many countries in the world towards Israel.

By this time Islamic militancy in Kashmir had made its presence felt, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the end of Cold War constraints on the Indo-Israel relationship, and India had started readjusting its relationship with sole remaining superpower, the United States, a strong and reliable strategic and defence partner of Israel. Since then, the Indo-Israel bilateral relationship has attained a new dynamic with a significant upward trend. However, while the exchanges in diverse fields have intensified, the overall links have deliberately remained low profile. Such an approach was thought to be necessary to shield India's other stakes in West Asia from being affected by the Arabian nations' hostility towards Israel.

Although the Indo-Israel relationship began growing after the establishment of diplomatic links in 1992, it could not be materialized into a full-fledged defence relationship. However, economic, diplomatic and cultural ties were established and there was a positive trend. In 1994, two years after diplomatic relations were established, the then director general of Defence Ministry Major General (res.) David Ivry signed an agreement with the Indian Defence Ministry for security cooperation between the two countries. However, this nascent bonhomie could not materialize into the strategic and defence area because of the political instability, and a mix of socialist, left-wing and Congress party governments in power. But the turning point came when a significant political change took place in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a government led by a Hindu National right of centre party came to power in 1996 for 13 months and then in 1998 for a full term. The prominent leaders of the BJP, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister L.K. Advani, had an admiration for Israel for its survival in a hostile neighbourhood, and their view on the threat of global Islamist terrorism coincided with that of Israel. India conducted nuclear tests in 1998, followed by Pakistan two weeks

later. India was criticized heavily for starting a nuclear arms race on the subcontinent and heavy sanctions were imposed by the US, Japan, Britain and China. However, France, Russia and Israel were sympathetic to India's concerns over security threats.

A number of high-profile visits by Indian politicians to Israel took place. The visits of two high-profile ministers in quick succession during the term of the BJP-led government reflected the importance that Israel had come to occupy in Indian strategic and security concerns. The first was the visit of the Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani, known for his hardline stance on Islamist terrorism. His visit drew much attention in the international media because of the group of delegates (heads of India's intelligence agencies Research Analysis Wing (RAW), Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the central police organization fighting terrorism) that accompanied him, his interactions in Israel besides those required by protocol and his own hardline stance on Islamist terrorism.

This Indian delegation led by Advani talked about collaboration in internal security management and formalized intelligence sharing and cooperation agreement in meetings with the Mossad chief and Israeli ministers responsible for security. Israel was supportive of India's anti-terrorism efforts and Israeli intelligence agencies agreed to open offices in New Delhi along the lines of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).<sup>7</sup> Israel agreed to enhance its defence technology cooperation with India.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after, in July 2000, another high-profile visit took place – by Jaswant Singh of the BJP-led government, the first Indian foreign minister to visit Israel. The visit resulted in meaningful dialogue and a joint anti-terrorism commission was established. Singh and his Israeli counterpart, David Levy, agreed to meet every six months for strategic discussions and to intensify partnership in the areas of counter-terrorism, information technology and science and technology.<sup>9</sup> During the visit Singh argued that 'India's Israel policy became a captive to domestic policy that came to be unwillingly as unstated veto to India's larger West Asian Policy' [sic] and termed the growing Indo-Israeli ties as a 'tectonic shift of consciousness'.<sup>10</sup> Since then high officials and ministers have made frequent visits to Israel and have signed many bilateral agreements focusing on a wide range of issues – diplomatic, economic and strategic/defence – in a clear indication that India has moved from Nehruvian hostility to a *realpolitik* based on a shared strategic vision. Also such developments as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the spreading of Islamist terrorism, and the exclusion of India and Israel from the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan while making Pakistan an ally in this effort brought the security, defence, intelligence and counter-terrorism issues to the forefront of the growing Indo-Israeli strategic partnership.

This period also coincided with frequent meetings and exchanges between top civil and military officials and high-profile politicians and ministers. At the end of November 2001, for the first time since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, an Israeli parliamentary delegation visited the Indian parliament. Earlier that month a defence delegation headed by Ministry of Defence Director General Amos Yaron visited New Delhi for a strategic dialogue, followed in December 2001 by three official Israeli delegations which conducted the bilateral semi-annual political dialogue in New Delhi. In January 2002, an Indian delegation visited Israel to discuss the war against terrorism.<sup>11</sup> In this context, Prime Minister Sharon's visit to India in September 2003 was an important benchmark in that it made clear to the international community that India was no longer shy about its growing courtship with Israel.

There were fears that the ascendancy of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) might be damaging to Indo-Israeli relations, but this did not happen and the UPA government not only sustained the relationship but broadened it further, with many ministerial visits to Israel and the attendant conclusion of agreements in all spheres of life. Thus, for example, Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal visited Israel in July 2005 and signed a bilateral agreement to pursue technological ventures, including the establishment of a joint industrial research and development fund, while Minister of State for Rural Development Kumari Selja paid a visit to Israel in September 2005. Minister for Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath visited Israel in November 2005, during which a Joint Study Group (JSG) was established to boost bilateral trade from \$2 billion to \$5 billion by 2008. In the same month, Sharad Pawar, Union Minister for Agriculture, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, visited Israel to represent India at the official memorial ceremony on the tenth anniversary of Prime Minister Rabin's assassination. During his visit the two sides exchanged ideas regarding the broadening and intensification of bilateral cooperation in agriculture, including in micro irrigation and dairy farming.<sup>12</sup> India's Commerce Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia, visited Israel in February 2010 to discuss a free trade

agreement, meeting with President Shimon Peres, Industry, Trade and Labour Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, and representatives of Israel's water technology and high-tech industries.

### **Growing counter-terrorism collaboration**

Fighting terrorism is a major issue and challenge for India and Israel. Both are democratic, pluralistic states with large domestic Muslim minorities and both face the scourge of Islamist terrorism sponsored by their neighbours. This shared dilemma has led to a better understanding of each other's strategic and security concerns.

Both countries share an identical view of non-proliferation regimes such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Though couched in terms of principles, India's primary objection to the NPT revolves around regional security considerations similar to those articulated by Israel. Yet while Israel still retains its status as a threshold nuclear power, India, by conducting nuclear tests in May 1998, has abandoned its long-held nuclear ambiguity. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, some of the strategic moves

of both countries have come under greater US scrutiny.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, as noted above, both countries were left out of the post-9/11 US-led War on Terror. Washington did not want Israel in the coalition so as to be able to include the Arab states; it likewise needed Pakistan, the Taliban's erstwhile sponsor, so it kept India at arm's length despite New Delhi's unconditional support for the War on Terror. No wonder, then, that India, despite its huge size, feels, like Israel, that it has to build its own tools for protecting its citizens and borders from terrorism.

New Delhi has found it increasingly beneficial to learn from Israel's experience in dealing with terrorism, given the latter's long-term suffering from cross-border terrorism. And the terrorism that both India and Israel face comes not only from disaffected groups within their territories but is aided and abetted by the neighbouring states, mostly under non-democratic regimes, and increasingly capable of transferring weapons of mass destruction to terrorist organizations. States such as Pakistan and some of the countries surrounding Israel have long used terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. There are, thus, distinct structural similarities in the kinds of threat that India and Israel face from terrorism. It is also important to note that when the radical mullahs call upon their followers to take up arms in support of jihad, their foremost exhortations have always been the 'liberation of all of mandatory Palestine and Kashmir' and the annihilation of the US.

India has the second largest Muslim population in the world and Israel's close ties with New Delhi can help Jerusalem diplomatically and politically and can water down religious factors in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The August 2007 visit to Israel by an Indian Muslim delegation is worth mentioning. This delegation of the All India Organization of Imams and Mosques led by Mawlana Jamil Ilyas was organized by the American Jewish Council and helped underscore both the Israeli claim that the Palestine question was essentially a political, rather than a religious issue, and the feasibility of an interfaith dialogue between democratic societies (indeed, the Israel visit followed a trip to India by Jewish rabbis for an interfaith meeting).<sup>15</sup> As a result, a basic understanding has emerged between India and Israel that notwithstanding the different circumstances of their respective terrorist threats, there can be no compromise with terrorists. India sees Israel as a source of training and professional/material aid in its fight against terrorism and Israel is more than willing to allow India to benefit from its extensive experience.

### **Defence industry cooperation**

The driving force of Indo-Israeli bilateral ties is the defence cooperation between the two states, with Israel becoming India's most significant arms supplier in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As Moscow's biggest arms customer, with licences for manufacturing some weapons platforms, the Soviet collapse left India with vast amounts of dated equipment unsuitable for military use. The Israeli defence industry has long specialized in developing electronic subsystems to upgrade planes, ships and tanks, with technologies ranging from ammunition to night vision equipment, to navigation equipment, to target acquisition systems and sensors, which dramatically improve the capabilities of otherwise outdated platforms. This proved a major boon for the Indian armed forces, especially its air force needs, and Jerusalem did not fail to exploit the reluctance on the part of other big arms producers, notably Washington, to fill the Soviet void and enter the Indian defence market in strength.

Having fought many major wars since its inception and encountering continuous major threats to its national security, citizenship and borders, Israel has developed one of the world's leading defence industries, with its products leading the market in many fields. With the defence industries forming one of its foremost economic engines, Israel produces a wide range of products from ammunition, small arms and artillery pieces to sophisticated electronic systems, UAVs, satellite systems and the world's most advanced tank.

By way of competing with its much larger competitors, Israel's arms export policy has shown great flexibility and ingenuity. In the Indian case, the Israeli readiness to bypass the P5 embargo on the transfer of sensitive high-tech defence technology to New Delhi, on account of its refusal to sign the NPT, allowed it to make significant inroads into the Indian defence market through the provision of anti-missile systems, high-tech radars, sky drones, night vision equipment, satellite systems and other sophisticated equipment.<sup>16</sup>

The prospects for the collaboration in the defence industry are likely to increase as India has decided to opt for modernization and diversification of its weapons systems. In fact, Israel's technology-strong R&D defence industry is highly complementary to India's defence industry and may well serve both nations' future strategic and economic interests.<sup>17</sup>

India– Israel defence cooperation has deepened particularly in the missile defence system as India has focused on its missile defence programme, looking at the threats that may emanate from adversarial nations like Pakistan and China. India is keen to collaborate with nations that have cutting edge superiority in missile defence systems. While cooperating with Russia, India entered into missile defence cooperation with the US after endorsing a missile defence system in 2000 proposed by the Bush administration. However, New Delhi's missile defence collaboration with Israel surpasses any other current Indian bilateral collaboration in this field. Israel has made excellent advances in missile defence and has become a major player in interception technologies at the global level. In some ways it is ahead of even the European and American products, and India is aware of that.

The first major weapons deal was for two Green Pine early warning systems against ground-to-ground missiles from Pakistan. The Arrow II system is the most sought-after Israeli missile defence interception technology. The Arrow Weapon System (AWS) is supposedly a far more reliable defence shield than the Patriot missile defence system used by the US during the 1991 Gulf War. The Arrow II has the capability of detecting and tracking up to 14 incoming missiles. Its usefulness lies in it being stationed along the Line of Control (LoC) to secure the population and military establishments in Kashmir. Israel has also developed a series of augmented air and theatre defence systems, such as the Barak anti-ship missile, Spyder, Hawk and Nimrod. A short-range interceptor called 'Iron Dome' and medium-range interceptor called 'Magic Wand' is under development.

India wanted to buy the Israeli Arrow-2 system from Israel, a deal that required US approval, only to encounter Washington's opposition to the deal, citing Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) commitments, and an alternative offer of the PAC-3.<sup>18</sup> India acquired the Green Pine early warning and fire-control radar associated with the Arrow II Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missile (ATBM) and the Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) from Israel. The Indian Navy acquired the Barak anti-ship system, to be co-produced in India, and the Indian Air Force (IAF) is looking at the Spyder system from Israel to meet its air defence requirements.<sup>19</sup> Although Israel Aircraft Industries is the main body dealing with all weapons systems sales to India, non-state companies are also involved. Both state and non-state companies are heavily involved in the Indian defence industry market. The state-owned Israel Aircraft Industries and Rafael manufacture the Barak Naval Missile system, Searcher Drones and the Gilanti-tank missile, among other products, while non-state companies such as Soltam, Elbit Systems and Tadiran Communications refit Russian 133mm cannon into 155mm howitzers and upgrade T-72 tanks.<sup>20</sup>

### **Economic and trade relations**

Although cooperation in the realm of defence and anti-terrorism has driven India and Israel closer, the two states are also making concerted efforts to diversify this relationship, and their advent as industrialized and technologically advanced states has opened many fields for bilateral cooperation.

Israel's high-tech industry has been experiencing an unprecedented growth since the early 1990s, which has turned it into a 'start-up nation' with numerous Israel-developed applications now adorning products of the largest multinational companies in the communications, computers, information systems, medicines, optics, consumer goods and software sectors.<sup>21</sup> Small wonder that there has been a six-fold increase in India's trade with Israel over the last decade, with New Delhi becoming Jerusalem's second largest trading partner in Asia in non-military goods and services. And while the bilateral relationship has been focused mainly on defence and security products, it is rapidly spreading to other fields. Almost all India's exports to Israel are diamonds, medications and plastics, while Israel's exports to the subcontinent consist almost entirely of fertilizers, polished diamonds and gems, and electronic equipment. There is a possibility of expanding the basket of products. India has been considering the idea of entering a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Israel since 2007 and in February 2015, following discussion of the issue between prime ministers Modi and Netanyahu during a September 2014 meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly annual session, an Israeli delegation arrived in New Delhi to resume talks on the matter.<sup>22</sup> Israel has made excellent progress in water harvesting management and areas such as water technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology offer new areas where both states can further expand their collaboration. Israel is also a world power in water management and high-tech agriculture – from breeding 'advanced' seeds to fertilization and irrigation – while India has a huge manpower base as well as a huge market; these are complementary abilities. The same is true of alternative energy: Israel has developed solar power technology, while India has worked on wind power.<sup>23</sup>

High technology in the future is expected to form an important component of India–Israel trade and economic relations. In June 2011 the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at spurring cross-border innovation and entrepreneurship. They have added high technology to their bilateral trade with an agreement between the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Israel High Tech Industries Association. There is potential of collaboration between Israel's innovative prowess and India's huge and talented pool of human resources. The software industry is complementary as Indian firms are entirely process oriented and Israeli firms are much more about products.<sup>24</sup>

### **Constraints and limitations**

Despite the growing Indo-Israel bonhomie on a range of issues there remain bottlenecks that need to be addressed by both countries. To begin with, India's domestic politics is woven around its Muslim vote bank politics and their sentiments remain a constraining factor in the bilateral relationship. India is home to the world's second largest Muslim population of some 150 million which is relatively moderate and not particularly hostile to Israel. There is a general awareness amongst Indian policy makers and the political parties of the need to be careful in dealing with Israel. While this factor does not figure much when the BJP is in power, it does affect a Congress Party-led government. Indian Muslims have been traditional Congress voters to date. Any decision the Congress Party makes with regard to Israel cannot be oblivious of this factor and compels it not to adopt an excessively welcoming approach to Israel.

The sizeable Muslim population and its support for the establishment of a Palestinian state and India's consistent support for this move is a specific limiting factor. New Delhi has given substantial humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and condemned many Israeli policies and actions in this sphere; and while it has stopped actively supporting the Arab world's anti-Israel policy and legislation, India still votes in favour of UN resolutions condemning Israeli policies, notably during the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, even as the Indian government welcomed Sharon in 2003, it made it clear that it would neither dilute its traditional support for the Palestinian cause nor abandon Yasser Arafat as leader of the Palestinians. Until his death in November 2004, India regarded Arafat as a symbol of Palestinian nationalism and as such central to any peace process, a view in complete contrast to that of the Sharon government, which favoured the expulsion of Arafat from the territories and the emergence of an alternative Palestinian leadership. This disagreement over Arafat's role is not to say that a subtle re-evaluation of India's Middle East policy was not underway.<sup>26</sup>

New Delhi has to tread a delicate path with Israel so as to avoid reflecting the 'Clash of Civilizations' argument or allegations regarding an anti-Islamic Hindu–Jewish axis. Israel's handling of the Palestinian issue will also be a major issue as it would be difficult for India to justify its relationship and support for Israel if

Israel's policy become blatantly harsh.<sup>27</sup>

More broadly, the bilateral relationship is dependent on India's Middle East policy, its interests in the Gulf region, and the Muslim factor. Externally, the Muslim constraint relates to New Delhi's interdependence with the Middle East. India has trade links with Gulf countries, and about 3 million Indians work in the Gulf region, the biggest source of hydrocarbon sources of energy. India's Israel policy is guided by fears of harming close ties and strategic interests with the Muslim and Arab world rather than a real interest in or concern with the Arab-Israeli conflict. This hinders the development of closer diplomatic and political ties and drives Indian efforts to keep relations with Israel away from the glare of publicity.<sup>28</sup>

India's enhanced relationship with Iran can also be a constraining factor. Tehran remains one of Israel's biggest, if not the biggest, existential threat and Jerusalem is naturally concerned about India's growing ties with Iran, especially in the defence and military fields (e.g. sharing some of the technologies derived from Israel).<sup>29</sup> Israel would like India to acknowledge the threat posed by a nuclear Iran and would like Indian help in efforts to stabilize the volatile security situation in West Asia. While India and Israel need not make their bilateral partnership a function of third country, India will have to exert extreme care and subtlety in dealing with Middle East.

Finally, the Indo-Israeli courtship is not immune to the US factor. Washington has played a rather ambivalent role, as both a constraint and an encouragement. Since the late 1960s the US has been Israel's primary supplier of weapons and advanced military technology and as such has exerted great influence on its defence-related sales. In 2003 Washington opposed Israel selling India the Arrow anti-ballistic missile defence system, a joint US-Israeli venture, leading to the cancellation of the deal. The Indo-Israeli defence partnership has suffered less on account of the US factor than have Chinese-Israeli military ties. In 2000 Washington vetoed Israel's sale of the Falcon to China, yet four years later Israel signed a defence deal for the sale of three Falcon systems to India. One explanation for the more favourable attitude is that while Washington feared that Israeli military sales to China would directly endanger its strategic interests it did not perceive the sales to India as such a threat. The Indo-Israeli defence ties fall into the US sphere of geostrategic interests. In this regard, a powerful, progressive India bolstered by Israeli technological expertise appears the most plausible and practical alternative.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

That the above issues have not dented the Indian-Israeli relationship indicates the existence of mutual respect for each other's constraints as both parties have come to realize and understand the limits arising from their domestic politics, international interests and security environment. Prior to 1992, India had made normalization of relations with Israel contingent on the resolution of the Palestinian problem, only to delink the two during that year and clarify in no uncertain terms that it was not prepared to make its relations with Israel hostage to this lingering problem.

Over the years the Indian government has also toned down its reaction to Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, which has come to evoke little more than mild disapproval, alongside its growing condemnation of Palestinian suicide bombings and other terrorist acts in Israel, something that had hitherto been seen as rather justified in light of the Palestinians' supposed oppression. Likewise, both India and Israel have abstained from expressing their views in international forums on issues that might constrain their partnership; and while Israel often resents India's lingering support for the Palestinian cause, it continues to respect New Delhi's position. Thus, for example, when in May 2010 Israel came under a barrage of international criticism over its forceful detention of a Turkey-originated flotilla seeking to break the naval blockade of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, during which some alleged Islamist militants were killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman 'reminded' UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that while 'the international community remained silent and passive' in the face of the killing of some 500 people in violent incidents a month earlier – in Thailand, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and India – 'Israel is being condemned for unmistakably defensive actions'.<sup>31</sup> As India protested over its mention among the states involving lethal violence, the Israeli Foreign Ministry came out with the statement that New Delhi's name was included by mistake, leading to the easing of the controversy.

In the two-plus decades since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two countries have become a very close partners collaborating in all aspects of the strategic, defence and security realms. India has adopted a more pragmatic and realistic approach towards the changed international environment and its relations with Israel attest to this shift. Yet by way of tackling such constraints as the Israel– Palestine conflict, New Delhi’s growing relationship with Iran and the domestic compulsion of the Muslim population, the Indian government will have to tread a very fine line between its relationship with Israel and wider Middle Eastern policy. Yet given the current security threats and emerging geo-political and geo-economic dynamics the India– Israel relationship seems likely to become deeper and more comprehensive.

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