Chapter Three

India’s Diplomatic Relationship with Israel: Impact on Palestine

India formally announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel on January 29, 1992 under the Prime Ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. The move in this direction was undertaken in mid-1980 when Rajiv Gandhi, known for his non-ideological approach to foreign policy, assumed office in October 1984 following the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi. In September 1985, for instance, Rajiv Gandhi met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Pares during the annual UN General Assembly session. A few months later Israel was allowed to post a regular vice consul in Bombay to replace Yossef Hasseen who had been expelled in June 1982 for his controversial interview to the Indian media. In 1988, after a gap of six years, the Israeli representation was elevated to the pre-1982 position of consul.

Rajiv Gandhi and the Normalisation of Relationship with Israel

During Rajiv’s tenure both countries also played the quarter-final of the Davis Cup Tennis Tournament in July 1987. The match generated a lively public debate in India on the question of normalisation of relationship with

Israel\textsuperscript{176}. The nascent normalisation gained momentum in June 1988 when during his visit to the US, Rajiv Gandhi met a group of Jewish leaders to discuss the issue. Towards the end of that year, India formally extended the jurisdiction of the Israel consul to the south Indian state of Kerala which has a significant number of Jewish populations\textsuperscript{177}. During the special session convened in Geneva, the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, K.K Tiwari, headed the Indian delegation. Despite the event of the Palestinian uprising and the denial of a visa by the US to the PLO Chairman, Yasser Arafat to address the General Assembly in New York, Tiwari refrained from denouncing Israel. Earlier, condemning Israel and holding it responsible for escalating tension in West Asia had been the conventional part of Indian speech in the UN. Not only that, India also recognised Israel’s right to exist “in peace and security within internationally recognised boundaries”\textsuperscript{178}. In January 1989, India hosted an-Anti Defamation League delegation as well as US Congressman Stephen Solarz. The question of normalisation figured prominently during

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\textsuperscript{176} C. Subramaniam, a former Cabinet Minister under Indira Gandhi, joined for instance with Israel’s traditional supporters. He sought to break the popular tendency of linking Israel with apartheid South Africa and publicly asked: “[Do] we need to be more Arab than Egypt?” The issue dominated the front pages of Indian newspapers for well over four months. Rajiv Gandhi eventually gave the games the green light. For more see P.R Kumarswami, \textit{India’s Israel Policy}, Columbia University Press, 2010 available at http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-15204-4/indias-israel-policy/excerpt

\textsuperscript{177} Kumarswami, “Israel- India Relations”, \textit{op cit.} No. 167.

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{National Herald}, December 18, 1988.
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their discussions with Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao and other senior government officials\textsuperscript{179}.

However, a number of impediments prevented Rajiv Gandhi from normalising relationship with Israel. The outbreak of the intifada in December 1987 significantly eroded Israel’s international standing and India was not immune to that process\textsuperscript{180}. Moreover, Israel’s involvement in the Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict, especially its military-intelligence cooperation, was viewed with suspicion and anger in India. It was feared that Israel’s involvement in the conflict would strengthen Colombo’s determination to impose a military solution on the ethnic conflict and thereby undermine India’s interests in the region\textsuperscript{181}. Furthermore, other factors such as rapid erosion in his domestic popularity especially due to the allegations of bribery in arms deals followed by the electoral reversals of the Congress party in 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the era of political uncertainty resulting in two minority governments in quick succession which were preoccupied with their survival rather than offering any substantive foreign policy initiatives and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi himself by the LTTE guerrillas in 1991 prevented normalisation of relationship with Israel.

\textsuperscript{179} They included Alfred Gonsalves, Secretary and P.K Singh, Joint Secretary, MEA. For more see Hindu, January 6, 1989.

\textsuperscript{180} Kumarswami “Israel- India Relations”, \textit{op cit.}, No. 167.

\textsuperscript{181} For a detail account see P.R Kumarswami, “The Israeli Connections of Sri Lanka”, \textit{Strategic Analyses}, Vol. 11, No. 11, February 1987, pp. 141-55.
P.V Narasimha Rao became India’s new Prime Minister on June 21, 1991. Within days after Rao’s assumption of office, a group of Israeli tourists were kidnapped and attacked by the terrorists (The Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front) in Jammu and Kashmir. Following this, the government declared that normal consular restrictions would not impede the handling of a humanitarian problem. Prime Minister Rao agreed to the visit of a senior Israeli diplomat, Moshe Yegar, to coordinate the release of the Israeli nationals with Consul Giora Becher. After days of hectic behind-the-scenes negotiations, the militants released the Israeli tourists. On 16 December 1991, India voted with the majority of UN members in repealing the 1975 General Assembly Resolutions equating Zionism with racism.

As one of the original supporter of the resolution, this marked a significant departure from the past and the voting was considered as a sign of pragmatism in India’s foreign policy.

**Domestic Discourse and the Normalisation of Relationship**

During this time, the Indian media, both electronic and print, started what could be termed as a concerted campaign for normalization of relationships with Israel.
relationship with Israel. Spearheaded by the well-known strategic expert–turned-academic C. Raja Mohan, the pragmatists saw normalization within the context of the emerging post–Cold War global order. They argued that the earlier justifications for an anti-Israeli policy had crumbled and urged India to recognize and capitalize the new Middle Eastern reality opened up by the 1991 Gulf War that dispelled any doubts as to where the loyalties of the oil-rich Arab monarchies laid, in spite of their many grievances against the United States and the Madrid Peace Conference. The country’s opposition parties also maintained a pro-Israeli stand and kept a constant pressure on the government to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. From the BJP side, Pramod Mahajan spearheaded this demand. He was supported by Yashwant Sinha (Samajwadi Janata Party) while Subramanyam Swamy (Janata Party) and R.K. Karanja (nominated) wanted a more humane approach towards Israel. Pramod Mahajan pointed out that both China and Pakistan had occupied large parts of Indian territory yet there were full diplomatic links with them. Yashwant Sinha similarly maintained that India’s foreign policy should be based on national interest. By being pro Arab all these

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185 In November 1991, the Indian Television network Doordarshan (which reaches 87% of the Indian population), for instance, 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.

186 For more on this debate see Kumarswami, India’s Israel Policy op cit., No. 167.

years, India was not able to get the support of the Arab countries during critical times and that most of these countries had been consistently pro-Pakistani\textsuperscript{188}.

The pragmatists and the pro-Israeli elements put forward three main arguments in support of their view\textsuperscript{189}. First, by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, India would be in a better position to engage itself in the West Asian peace process and thereby influence the Israel policy in favour of the Palestinians. The continued refusal to establish diplomatic relationship with Israel limited India’s role as a possible peace-maker between the Arabs and the Israelis\textsuperscript{190}.

\textsuperscript{188} Financial Express, November 28, 1991.

\textsuperscript{189} It is a cardinal principle of the “realist” theory of International Relations that the foreign policy of a sovereign nation state ought to be in pursuit of the “national interest” (Hans Morgenthau, “In Defence of the National Interest”, 1951). Any deviation from this course in response, for instance, to the pressures of domestic religious or ethnic minority groups, is fraught with peril and may lead to the defeat and even extinction of the state. For excellent arguments in the Indian context, see C. Rajamohan, Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy, Delhi: Penguin, 2003 and his paper “Rethinking India’s Grand Strategy” in N. S. Sisodia and C. Uday Bhaskar (eds.), Emerging India, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, 2005.

\textsuperscript{190} Prime Minister Rao, for instance said “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. Moshe Yegar, former Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry stated that 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, Russia, the United States, and even Syria would be in. Itzhak Gerberg argued 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. For more on this see Itzhak Gerberg, India–Israel Relations: Strategic Interests, Politics and Diplomatic Pragmatism, Israel National Defence College, IDF, February 2010. See also Times of India, January 25, 1992, “Israeli Terms on India’s Role”; Hindustan Times, January 22, 1992; also see Maqsudul Hasan Nuri, “The Indo-Israel Nexus”, Regional Studies, Vol. X11, No. 3, Summer 1994, p. 10.
Second it was argued that in concrete terms, there were many advantages for India in establishing ties with Israel in specific areas like military modernisation, agricultural innovation and global Jewish investment. J.N Dixit, for instance argued that Israel’s agricultural experiences in dry farming, desert irrigation, agro-industries and agricultural cooperatives could prove beneficial to India. Ali Khan similarly argued “India could set the ball rolling for transfer of technology for agricultural and other purposes”.

India could also benefit in combating terrorism in the states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir from the Israeli experience and expertise in this regard. The type of terrorism that both India and Israel faced came not only from disaffected groups within their territories but it was also aided and abetted by the neighbouring states, mostly under non-democratic regimes, increasingly capable of transferring weapons of mass destruction to the terrorist organizations. States such as Pakistan in South Asia, or Iran and Syria in Middle East, had long used terror as an

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191 J. N Dixit, My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary, UBSPD, New Delhi, 1996.


193 J. N Dixit for instance argued that 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. For more see his book My South Block Year op cit. Similarly, 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.
instrument of their foreign policies. Moreover, the tactics used by the Israeli Defence Forces [IDF] in the guerrilla and urban warfare could be fruitfully adopted by the Indian security forces in countering insurgency. These tactics have even been found useful by the U.S. forces in Iraq who had to learn IDF strategy of urban warfare to tackle growing insurgency there. There were, thus, distinct structural similarities in the kind of threat that India and Israel faced from terrorism. It is also important to note that when the extremist mullahs call upon their followers to take up arms in support of an Islamic jihad, their topmost exhortations have always been the “liberation” of all of mandatory Palestine, Kashmir, and the annihilation of the United States\(^{194}\). Third, the emergence of an Islamic bloc in world politics made it essential for India to move closer to Israel\(^{195}\). Martin Sherman, for instance argued that “An alliance between India and Israel openly endorsed by the U.S. would create a potent stabilizing force in the


region, which together with like-minded regimes such as Turkey, could contribute significantly towards facing down the force of radical extremism so hostile to American interests in Western and Central Asia”\(^{196}\). Finally, it was argued that there were a lot of commonalities that hanged these two countries together - both shared a historical background as ancient civilizations, administered as colonies by Great Britain, established less than a year apart (India in August 1947 and Israel in May 1948), became democracies and survived in a sea of hostility, surrounded by implacable adversaries and a heavily militarized security environment. In addition, both nations fought wars in nearly every decade of their existence and suffered too much at the hands of state-sponsored Islamic jihadi terrorism\(^{197}\). Finally, despite what conspiracy theorists might say, neither country had a quarrel with Islam—both house Muslim populations that enjoy more rights than their co-religionists in many other places\(^{198}\).

The traditionalists who strongly opposed any diplomatic move towards Israel and favoured status quo on moral and humanitarian grounds put forward equally powerful counter-arguments in this regard.

Challenging the realist contention that by establishing diplomatic relations


with Israel, India would be in a better position to involve itself in the West Asian peace process, Bansidhar Pradhan argued that these people were probably living in a make believe world. He is of the view that to what extent India has been playing this role in this regard ever since its full diplomatic relations with Israel is there for everyone to see. Even if one accepts this argument, there are other ways and means by which India could have been involved in the peace process. Moreover, it may not be an exaggeration to say that even the US which has been a constant source of support—diplomatic, political, military and economic—to the continued existence of Israel from the beginning at times found it difficult to influence the Israel government beyond a point. This is for a country from which Israel receives billions of dollars in foreign aid annually. In view if this, it sounded ridiculous to expect that India could influence Israel’s policy even nominally. Sreekantan Nair similarly argued that the justifications and reasons advanced by India in not making relationship with Israel, at the time of recognition, could be seen and felt in the present context as well. Therefore, the linking of India’s diplomatic relation with Israel to the developments in West Asian peace process sounds futile in essence.

As for the concrete benefits, the traditionalists noted that had this been the case, India could have established diplomatic relations with Israel

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199 Pradhan, “India’s Policy Towards the PLO”, No. 148, pp. 74-75.

200 Nair, Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed op cit, No. 31, p. 119.
and benefited from its expertise in combating terrorism when the problem was at its peak during the 1980’s. The claims about the gains of Indo-Israeli cooperation against terrorism seemed to be over stated because of the following reasons. First, at the conceptual level, there are fundamental differences between the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the Palestine issue. India is fighting against Pakistan which is not only occupying almost one third of Jammu and Kashmir but also using the territory as a springboard for terrorist operations to subvert international acclaimed democratic process there. Israel on the contrary, is in occupation of Palestinian land and the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza are resisting the illegal occupation. Second, the Israeli success in combating terrorism is at best dubious. The fact that the Israelis today are more insecure than ever before speaks enough about the effectiveness of the Israeli approach to terrorism. As Harsh Pant argues, “Israel's tough policy toward contentious neighbours and the Palestinians has not brought peace and security, but has rather served to entrench hatred in the Arab world”. This is not to deny that Israel can be of some help to India in terms of sullying sophisticated weaponry to fight terrorism. Third, India has handled its counter-insurgency operations in a much restrained manner than Israel.

Finally, at the policy level, India’s so called common cause with Israel in

\[201\] Pradhan, “Changing Dynamics of India’s West Asia Policy”, *op cit.*, No. 5, pp. 81-83.

fighting terrorism may send a wrong message to other important allies in the region with which India has substantial relations in diverse fields. Iran is one such country which is concerned with the growing Indo-Israeli strategic cooperation. Similarly Pakistan is sure to exploit the anti-terrorism front between India and Israel by giving it a religious colour. As A.K Pasha has rightly remarked “India has both the capacity and the experience to overcome all threats from Pakistan without outside help and ‘to give an impression that India would tackle this threat with (Israel’s) expertise or experience sends the wrong signal to many people both at home and abroad’”.

Third, the pragmatists argued that the emergence of an Islamic bloc in world politics made it essential for India to move closer to Israel. According to Bansidhar Pradhan, the talk of the emergence of an ‘aggressive Islamic bloc’ is basically an American projected new horror in the post-Cold War politics. After the unexpected disintegration of the Soviet Union, the American Military-Industrial complex was looking for a rationale to preserve its predominant role in US foreign policy making and

\[203\] A.K Pasha, *India and OIC: Strategy and Diplomacy*, Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi, 1995, p. 42. Nabil Sha’ath, the Palestinian Foreign Minister, in an interview to *The Hindu* on the eve of Prime Minister Sharon’s visit to India similarly argued that “Israel would like to make it look as if all Palestinian resistance was terrorism. Identifying with that puts you (India) in a position of being anti-Palestinian when there is no need to do so.”

\[204\] Pradhan, “India’s Policy Towards the PLO” op cit., No. 148, pp.77-81.
a talk of a new source of threat serves its interest well. Moreover, the American threat perception had been deliberately blown out of proportion which is not in tune with the ground realities. The Muslim world has never been a monolithic bloc nor is it in the process of becoming one. It is too diverse, both in terms of systemic and economic indicators, to reject it as a coherent, unified group so as to command decisive leverage in international politics. The eight year Iran-Iraq war had shown that the Muslim countries like any other modern state are guided more by their national interests and domestic political considerations at a given time than by religious considerations. Finally, it is absurd to think that the entire Islamic bloc will gang up against India on Pakistan’s plea simply because they are Muslim countries. Pakistan has been trying this ever since 1947 but only with limited success. India has been able to maintain fairly cordial relationship with the Muslim countries over the years\(^{205}\).

As far the commonalities between India and Israel are concerned, the traditionalists argued that India is a pluralist secular democracy while Israel prides itself on being an exclusivist and semi-theocratic Jewish state\(^{206}\). In other words, while Israel “unabashedly defends the rights of

\(^{205}\) Ibid.

\(^{206}\) For more see Hindu, “India’s Stake in the Palestine Cause” available at http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/04/05/stories/2002040501151000.htm
Jews over all others, India (as a state) has never claimed religious exclusivism for its Hindu citizens.

However, with the change of the international scenario caused by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the called pragmatists got an upper hand in the foreign policy debate as the Government began negotiations with Israel over normalisation of ties with the Jewish state. Within days of the UN vote, ‘preliminary discussions were held between a senior Indian diplomat in Washington and the visiting head of the Israeli foreign Ministry\textsuperscript{207}. On 29 January 1992, India formally announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel, considered by some as one of the most important steps in Indian diplomacy\textsuperscript{208}.

Factors That Contributed to Normalisation

Since it is widely accepted that India’s decision to normalise relations with Israel was taken against the backdrop of sweeping changes at the international, regional and national levels, it would be appropriate to briefly focus on those changes and these impacted India’s decision.

The first was the end of the Cold War which dealt a severe blow to ideological opposition towards Israel. Even though India’s anti-Israeli policy

\textsuperscript{207} Kumarswami, “Israel- India Relations”, \textit{op cit.}, No. 167, p. 265.

\textsuperscript{208} J. N Dixit considered India’s establishment of diplomatic relations with South Africa and then with Israel as the most significant among developments in its foreign policy, which occurred during his tenure as Foreign Secretary. For more see his book \textit{My South Block Years op cit.}, No. 191.
had not evolved in the Cold War, the East West divide provided a strong ideological basis for it. Israel’s exclusion and isolation from the Third World, NAM, G-77 and a host of other such forums were the result of perceived Israeli identification with the West as well as due to the ideological opposition of the East\textsuperscript{209}. Now the end of the Cold War weakened the Non-Aligned Movement and reduced the ideological hostility towards Israel. This exerted a direct influence on the change of the Indian attitude to Israel in 1992.

The demise of Soviet Union in 1991 not only changed the world strategic balance and power structure in favour of the US but also created a security crisis for India. This is because India and the Soviet Union had been close allies for several decades and above all, the Soviet Union was meeting nearly 80 percent of India’s military needs\textsuperscript{210}. Now with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became imperative for India to find itself new partners and most importantly, new military suppliers. Improving relations with Israel seemed to be a convinient option, especially in the field of defence since the Jewish country had emerged as a growing source of advanced military technology and hardware in the world and possessed excellent relations with the USA. Moreover, the shared Indian

\textsuperscript{209} Gopal and Sharma, \textit{India and Israel, op cit.}, No. 75, pp. 264-65.

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. This also led India to reconsider its policy towards Israel.

With the collapse of socialist system of economy led by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation became the triple slogans of change in the global economic scenario. Unlike the Cold War period where ‘divisions were created and alliances formed along ideological lines”, during the post-Cold War era, ‘economic competition” drove ‘international relations” leading to an intensification of competition over access to “vital economic assets” like oil and natural gas. The Rao government faced critical choices. On the one hand, there were the Congress traditions of Nehruvian socialism (mixed economy), non-alignment and anti-imperialist thrust in foreign policy. On the other hand, there was the “dramatic worldwide trend towards market reforms” and the necessity to integrate with the world economy. India had to either adapt to the new reality by embarking on the path of economic

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liberalisation and moving closer to the US or risk being isolated\textsuperscript{212}. Dithering in a deep economic crisis and acute foreign exchange shortage\textsuperscript{213}, the Rao government preferred the first option. Thus, the compulsions of globalisation and India’s subsequent acceptance of the path of economic liberalisation made it more dependent on the US as the latter exercised a decisive say in international financial agencies like the IMF and the WB. The success of the market economy depended heavily upon financial investments and technological cooperation from the West, especially the USA. So the US factor has played a major role in influencing India’s foreign policy orientation in the post-Cold War era\textsuperscript{214}. Second and no less important, 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 for a number of reasons including to overcome the propaganda unleashed by Pakistan on Kashmir situation. Indian leaders came to assume that normalization with Israel would facilitate India's rapprochement with the United States, since they believed


\textsuperscript{213} During this period, 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.

\textsuperscript{214} Pradhan, “Globalisation and the Shift in India’s Palestine Policy” \textit{op cit}. No. 212, p. 289.
that the American Jewish lobby had a very significant influence on the foreign policy decisions of Washington\textsuperscript{215}. As Mohammed Ali Khan argued, “Normal relations with Israel could help turn pro-Israeli lobbies in the US to show at least a modicum of leaning towards India”\textsuperscript{216}. 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 U.S. political establishment\textsuperscript{217}. It is to be noted that India announced its decision to formally establish relations with Israel on the eve of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s visit to the US.

The PLO’s policy had also changed. Its decision at the Arab League meeting in Cairo on August 10, 1990 of siding with Iraq\textsuperscript{218} undermined the unity of the PLO as an entity\textsuperscript{219} and alienated Arafat from the principal

\textsuperscript{215} The Jewish minority in the United States, which is just 2\% of the total population, has enjoyed unparalleled economic mobility coupled with disproportionate academic and media influence during the past two generations. This has enabled it to organize the most powerful lobby in Washington: AIPAC (American Israel Political Action Committee). For more on this see John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, \textit{The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy}, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007.


\textsuperscript{219} Salah Khalaf, a PLO leader and many others argued that the Palestinians were vulnerable and as such should not take side in inter-Arab conflicts because Kuwait was always the supporter of the Palestinian cause and was always ready to absorb Palestinian labours. Khalaf was assassinated at the start of the Gulf war. The extreme HAMAS and Islamic Jihad too demanded
players in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. This led to
the marginalization of the Palestinian issue in Middle Eastern politics and
severe erosion of the PLO’s economic base since the PLO depended on
the Arab world’s diplomatic, financial, and military support to survive and to
fight against Israel. These developments compelled the PLO to
abandon its strategy of armed struggle against Israel and seek a
negotiated political settlement with the Jewish state.

The PLO recognised Israel’s existence and made a plea for initiating
the peace process. The USA’s recognition of PLO on the eve of Madrid
Conference accentuated the latter’s status. The Israeli Parliament Knesset
responded to this change by adopting a ‘new peace initiative’ with the
Palestinians. Within the PLO, there were groups who advocated for
change of policy in tune with the changing world. The aspiration of this
group was reflected in the Palestine National Council programme of
September 1991 to participate in the USA-USSR sponsored peace
process which was held on October 30, 1991 at Madrid. The conference

the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. For more see Muhammad Muslih, “The Shift in

220 Barry Rubin Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the Arab States Mideast Security and Policy
Studies, No. 36, January 1998 available at: http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/books/36pub.html and
Daniel Lieberfeld, “Secrecy and “Two-Level Games” in the Oslo Accord: What the Primary
Sources Tell Us”, International Negotiation 13 (2008) 133–146 available at:
http://www.duq.edu/policy-center/_pdf/lieberfeld-inter-neg.pdf


222 Muslih, “The Shift in Palestinian Thinking” op cit. No. 219, p. 27.
was attended by delegations from Israeli, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. There was also a Palestinian-Jordanian delegation comprising Palestinian delegation and Jordan delegation\textsuperscript{223}. The conference did not yield any tangible result. But it was not without significance. The conference symbolised the desire of both parties to seek a political solution to the protracted Arab Israeli conflict through direct negotiations\textsuperscript{224}. In certain ways, the Palestinian willingness to coexist with Israel vindicated India’s desire for a peaceful and amicable resolution of the conflict. Moreover, the Arabs, who did not recognise Israel, sat with the Israelis for negotiation. This was a de facto recognition of Israel as a state by them.

Furthermore, as a precondition for co-hosting the Madrid conference, the USSR restored full diplomatic ties with Israel on 18 October 1991. Even China discovered the virtues of the Jewish state and began moving towards normalization on 24 January, 1992. These developments in the Middle East forced India to recognise a new reality: that the Israeli-Palestine conflict was not a zero-sum game and it was


\textsuperscript{224} Thomas R. Mattair, “The Arab Israeli Conflict: The Madrid Conference and Beyond”, \textit{American Arab Affairs}, No. 37, Summer 1991.
possible to maintain close and cordial relations with both the parties to the conflict.\(^{225}\)

India’s decision to normalise relationship with Israel was made possible due to another development: India delinking Pakistan from its Middle East policy. Since the time of Nehru, India feared that Pakistan would make political capital out of ties with Israel. This could be one reason preventing New Delhi from establishing full diplomatic ties Tel Aviv soon after its recognition in 1952. However, the post-Madrid developments in favour of Israel greatly nullified Pakistan’s ability to score ‘brownie points’. Arab endorsement of a political settlement through direct negotiations with Israel weakened any arguments against India talking to Israel, especially when there were no bilateral disputes between the two countries to settle.\(^{226}\) India recognised that excessive focus on Pakistan or demanding its interlocutors to choose between the two South Asian neighbours was not always effective. Demanding third parties to minimise their commitments to Islamabad might even impede these countries from taking India seriously.

Apart from the Pakistan factor, the terrorism factor also played an important role in normalising Indo-Israel relations. The ‘Islamisation of


\(^{226}\) Ibid.
Palestine resistance movement with the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah compelled India to reconsider its West Asian policy. Being a country worst affected by Pak sponsored cross-border terrorism, India saw Israel and the US as viable partners to tackle the Islamic fundamentalist threat generating from West Asian, North African and some Central Asian states. India viewed that experience of Israel in handling the cross-border terrorist incursions would be greatly helpful to her.

India’s domestic politics also played a role. The Indian National Congress lost the 1989 elections and did not form a coalition government until after the June 1991 national elections. Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, the Indian Left was used to taking ‘inspiration’ from Moscow in their reading and assessment of international developments. The willingness of Moscow to normalize relations with Israel just days before the inauguration of the Madrid Peace conference in October 1991 and the sudden disappearance of the USSR left them rudderless. This was important because the Indian left had close relationship with the Congress party and provided a strong ideological foundation for its pro-Palestinian policy. On the contrary, the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a powerful force in Indian politics in early 1990s removed some hesitations about Israel. To the BJP, with its nationalist Hindu outlook, the

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228 Gopal and Sharma, India and Israel op cit, No. 75, p. 265.
Jewish state was not so much a diplomatic burden as a potential ally against Pakistan and radical Islam and it demanded establishment of full relations with Israel. There was also a realisation in India that India's largely pro-Arab stance in the Middle East had not been adequately rewarded by the Arab world. India had received no worthwhile backing from the Arab countries in the resolution of problems it faced in its neighbourhood, especially Kashmir. There had been no serious attempts by the Arab world to put pressure on Pakistan to reign in the cross-border insurgency in Kashmir. On the contrary, the Arab world had firmly stood by Pakistan using the Organisation of Islamic Conference to build support for Islamabad and the jihadi groups in Kashmir.229

Thus, a host of international, regional and domestic factors influenced India's decision to establish full diplomatic relationship with Israel in January 1992. Summing up the whole issue, J.N Dixit, the former Foreign Secretary, who was involved in the entire process of India's decision to establish diplomatic relationship with Israel wrote in his memoirs that “three important developments

229 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. 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 in 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 at New Delhi (after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel). In his memoirs J.N 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”. For more see Dixit, My South Block Years op cit., No. 191.
caused India to establish diplomatic ties with Israel: first – the Gulf War of 1991; second – the general attitude of the Arab states toward the problem of Kashmir; and, third – the conclusion of a peace agreement between the PLO and Israel. However, it is pertinent to mention here that although India established diplomatic relationship with Israel, the Indian embassy is in Tel Aviv and not in Jerusalem because it considers the status of the city as disputed.

**International & Domestic Reactions**

However, the response and reaction to this decision was different in different quarters. The commencement of diplomatic relationship was greeted both by the US and Israel. Stephen Solarz, the former Democratic Congressman, described India as ‘the largest democracy’ and Israel as ‘the most stable democracy in West Asia’ which have much in common.

In Israel, the news made headlines for the whole day on radio, television and in all the major newspapers which wrote lead editorials welcoming the move. Commenting on the ties, Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Pares said “For us India is not a country but a culture in which many of our children were educated from Tagore to Gandhi. We have been waiting for the moment to meet India diplomatically, economically and otherwise and we shall cooperate as friends at all possible levels.”

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Benjamin Netanyahu, a Cabinet minister in the Yitzhak Shamir’s Government said “It will benefit both countries. We have much to offer India in the fields of agricultural technologies, irrigation of drought-prone areas and health programmes. Similarly, India has a vast and advanced pool of scientists and the two countries can cooperate in numerous projects of mutual interests”\(^\text{233}\). Moshe Yegar, former Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, wrote “The establishment of diplomatic relations with two huge countries – China and India, which together are home to about half of the earth’s population– within one week, is no mean achievement. It is doubtful if any similar development has taken place in the annals of Israel’s diplomacy, except for the events of the first days after the achievement of statehood, when the United States, the Soviet Union and other countries announced their recognition of Israel one after the other\(^\text{234}\).”

The premier English daily *Jerusalem Post* in an editorial “India Joins the World” wrote “The argument that the Islamic world would side with Pakistan if India moves closer to Israel does not carry much weight. Islamic countries would naturally favour Pakistan under any


circumstances”. David Gross, the Editor of the *Jerusalem Post*, wrote ‘the progress in Indo-Israel relation was the result of developments in Kashmir during the last six months when an Israeli tourist was killed and others were kidnapped by Kashmir militants’.

In an article appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, Yaacov Shimoni, Director General for Asian Affairs in the Israeli Foreign Office wrote ‘the Indian decision to carry out diplomatic business with Israel was 44 years late’ which he thought was not an important flaw. He however felt that the important flaw of the Indian policy on Israel was that it did not stem from a ‘change of heart towards Israel’ but from the compulsion of the changed world scene. The primary Indian motivation in his view was to ‘improve relation with the US and join the Middle East peace process instead of leaving the initiative to China’. In addition, many Jewish governmental and academic circles attributed to the change in India’s attitude to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the advice of the US and quiet persuasion of some West European Powers together with the sophisticated diplomacy persuaded by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

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235 Quoted in Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel op cit.*, No. 75, p. 273.
238 Sharma, “US Influenced India’s Move” *op cit.*, No. 236.
The Arab press greeted the news with a mute reaction mentioning that it was not ‘unexpected and dramatic’ since efforts had been building up in that direction over the last few months. Almost all newspapers in the region carried the news in the front page without making any specific comments. But, no Arab country had openly criticised India’s move. There could be two reasons for this. First, the changed behaviour of the Arab states on the eve of Madrid Conference does not provide any scope for criticising India. When they themselves were willing to accept Israel’s existence and conduct negotiations with the Zionist state, how could they criticise India. Second, most of them must be suffering from the guilt conscience because of their pro-Pakistani stance on Kashmir as was evident from the proceedings of the OIC conferences on a number of occasions. 

\[239\] Mustafa El-Feki, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Egyptian Parliament, and a former Egyptian ambassador to India, in an article in Al-Ahram Weekly, for instance wrote. “First, we have made the error of viewing the Indian-Pakistani conflict from an Islamic perspective. We have tried to “Islamise” the ongoing conflict in South Asia, posing as protectors of Islam and custodians of the international community. And we have overlooked the regional role of India, with Arab leaders showing up in New Delhi much less frequently than before. Second was the rejection of India’s application for membership of the OIC. “A country with 120 million Muslim citizens applied for membership and what happened? Islamic countries, in typical naiveté, rejected the Indian application, imagining this would please Pakistan and teach India a lesson,” he said. Making a strong case for an even-handed Arab approach towards India and Pakistan, the former ambassador to India recalled that during his time in India, the Palestinian ambassador to New Delhi enjoyed the privilege of meeting the Indian prime minister at any time he wished to do so. But as the Islamic phenomenon spread and some Arab policies acquired a religious tint, India grew visibly suspicious of the Arab and Islamic worlds. To make things worse, Arab diplomacy in India was lackadaisical over the past two decades... We have lost India so far for no good reason, I should say… It is time we mend this error. It is time to bring Arab countries closer to both India and Pakistan, rather than take one side or keep our distance altogether. I believe the Arabs have only themselves to blame for India’s change of heart on the Palestinian question”. For similar critique of the Arab world’s policies towards India, see Abdullah Al Madani, “Indo-Israeli Ties: Arabs have None but Themselves to Blame,” Gulf News, September 14, 2003 and Sudha
However, in India, the reaction was mixed. The External Affairs Minister, Madhav Singh Solanki defended India’s upgradation of ties with Israel and said it formed the culmination of the recognition extended in 1950 and in no way constituted a reversal of its foreign policy. The BJP leader A.B Vajpayee welcomed the decision and hoped that India would now play a more meaningful role in solving the West Asian crisis and begin the process of close cooperation between the two countries. The party president, Murli Manohar Joshi, welcoming the decision, observed that there was no reason for withholding the decision given the fact that even Egypt had accepted and accorded full diplomatic recognition to Israel 15 years back and argued that the real reason for the delay ‘was the apprehension of Muslim votes in India’. In an article to Indian Express, L.K Advani wrote, “We in the BJP have long been of the view that India’s attitude towards Israel has been unrealistic and not having diplomatic relations with that country does not serve any purpose. We kept putting pressure to establish full-fledged relations with Israel”. Likewise Shiv Sareen, President of All India Hindu Mahasabha hailed the decision and


Ibid.

said that it was necessary to counter the influence of Islamic bloc on India. The Indian Jews were similarly jubilant and their various associations hailed the decision.

Majority of the national dailies also hailed the move. In an editorial “Shalom Israel”, *Times of India* for instance wrote “Though it is infuriatingly belated, India’s decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel is all the same of a truly historic import. It fees New Delhi’s West Asia policy from the clutches of dogma and fear. The dogma, deriving from India’s close rapport with the former Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, led New Delhi to espouse the Palestinian cause with a zeal not shared even by some Arab countries. The fear related to the possible loss of Arab support for New Delhi’s stand on Kashmir and to the alienation of Muslim opinion at home. Given the Western and especially American tilt in favour of Pakistan, the attitude towards Israel was by no means without merit. It appeared to be all the more credible in view of Israel’s occupation of Arab territories, its policy of creating Jewish settlements on them and its brutal suppression of Palestinian dissent. All this however, did not explain and much less to justify, ostracising Israel” especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. “New Delhi’s reluctance to make the move seemed quite bizarre, especially after China had done so,

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244 *Statesman op cit.*, No. 241.

none other than Saudi Arabia was willing to consider a similar step and not the least, after Mr Arafat, had given the nod\textsuperscript{246}.

Welcoming the decision, K Subramanyam, a prominent member of India’s strategic community and former Director of the New Delhi-based IDSA observed that the decision did not reflect any change in India’s West Asia policy. The decision was in fact long overdue as the existence of Israel had been accepted by India in 1950. He also said that it was a question of extending full diplomatic recognition, the absence of which was a handicap for India in espousing the Palestinian cause. India had no first-hand knowledge of what was happening in the Israeli-occupied territories\textsuperscript{247}. According to Shyam Saran, the shift in India’s position with the changing international environment was a ‘prudent act’\textsuperscript{248}. To Gursharan S. Dhaujal, it was a step that was inevitable\textsuperscript{249}.

However, a section of India’s population was highly critical of the move. Senior Cabinet Minister Arjun Singh warned that this decision would affect Muslim support for the Congress party and would be a departure

\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Times of India}, January 31, 1992.


\textsuperscript{248} Remarks made at IDSA Book Discussion Forum on India’s Israel Policy on March 9, 2011, New Delhi available at: http://www.idsa.in/event/IndiasIsraelPolicy

from the Nehruvian framework of India’s foreign policy\textsuperscript{250}. Partly due to similar concerns, the former Prime Minister V.P Singh also registered his opposition to normalisation. Chaturannan Mishra, the CPI National Secretary and M.P commented that it was ‘a step in haste\textsuperscript{251}. The Janata Dal MP, Syed Shahabuddin, said the decision at this juncture was ‘neither morally nor politically defensible\textsuperscript{252}.

Prominent Muslim leaders also criticised the decision. Maulana Syed Mohammed Musavi, Naib Imam of Jama Masjid and Syed Ahmed Bukhari flayed the Indian Government for establishing full diplomatic relationship with Israel and declared it as ‘ill timed and hasty\textsuperscript{253}. Again, Jawed Habeeb, a member of All India Babri Masjid Committee said that all aspects should have been taken into consideration before making the decision and that the US also should recognise PLO in return\textsuperscript{254}. The Student Union of the Aligarh Muslim University also criticised the Rao Government’s decision\textsuperscript{255}.

Members of the academia also criticised the move but they were not unanimous in their stand. For some, the move to normalise relations with Israel was a hasty, unnecessary and avoidable exercise. Bansidhar

\textsuperscript{250} Dixit, My South Block Years, op cit., No. 191.
\textsuperscript{251} Nair, Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed op cit., 31, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{252} Statesman, January 31, 1992.
\textsuperscript{253} Indian Express, January 31, 1992.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{255} Statesman, February 3, 1992.
Pradhan, for instance argued India ‘should have followed a cautious and go slow policy in establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel. It should have waited till the ground realities in the West Asian theatre changed substantially so as to remove the very basis of its decades-old anti-Israeli policy. Israel’s mere attendance of the Madrid Peace Conference in no way reflected a substantial policy change on its part towards the occupied territories and the Palestinians living under military occupation, in gross violation of established international law.256

Krishan Gopal and Sarabjit Sharma similarly argued ‘If India were to make a decision primarily on the criterion of Israel’s West Asia attitude, there was and there still is no case at all for establishing diplomatic ties. True, all of them have begun talking but Israel continues to hold out and is in illegal occupation of an entire country and parts of others. It is getting what was denied to it without an inch or an ounce of concession.257 According to Shamir Hasan, “the establishment of diplomatic relations has diluted India’s commitment to the high ideals of non-alignment, which had been the guiding force of our foreign policy. Israel represented all that was anathema to NAM, and a betrayal of NAM’s struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism, racism and for the rights of small countries to determine and shape their own destiny. For him, the establishment of ties with Israel

256 Bansidhar Pradhan, “India’s Policy Towards the PLO” op cit. No. 148, p. 73.

257 Gopal and Sharma, India and Israel op cit. No. 75, p. 272.
meant that India was now distancing itself from NAM, instead of reinforcing the movement to cope with the emerging international order258.

Many criticised the Government’s move for its ‘improper’, ‘undemocratic’ and ‘immature’ way of arriving at a significant political decision. They were especially sceptical on the way India took a decisive decision, which was done not by the Foreign Minister but by the Foreign Secretary, that too on the eve of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s visit to the US259. In their view, instead of making a ‘secret’ ‘hide and seek’ and covert manner of making decision and declaration, the Government of India should have taken the Parliament into confidence and gone into a bold manner of open declaration and decision to establish ties with Israel260.

Others criticised the move because it was taken under USA pressure. M.S Agwani, for instance, remarked that although the establishment of ‘full diplomatic relations with Israel was a correct decision […] to do so under American pressure was unwise261. To Ramtanu Maitra,
New Delhi’s decision on the Israel-Palestine issue was made in the US, though not necessarily by the Bush Administration\textsuperscript{262}. Some others saw the decision as ‘opportunistic’. According to Punyapriya Das Gupta, there took place ‘slippage from the vaulted moral foundation of India’s Foreign Policy’ where the gap was filled by the motives of real politik\textsuperscript{263}. To Sajad Ibrahim, the traders and business lobby in India and Israel played a crucial role in fostering the ties between the two countries for promoting mutual interests. The Indian business lobby was not interested any matters regarding the case of Palestinians since Palestine has little to offer financially or technologically, while Israel can sell to India what the US refuses to it\textsuperscript{264}. Shamir Hasan regretted that India’s course of action was guided by a peculiar perception of self interest rather than any sense of sympathy for Palestine\textsuperscript{265}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Punya Priya Dasgupta, “Betrayal of India’s Israel Policy” \textit{op cit.}, No. 92.
\item K M Sajad Ibrahim, “India’s Collaboration with Israel: A Policy of Opportunism”, \textit{FPRC Journal} (New Delhi) No.5, 2011, pp.139-151
\item Shamir Hasan, “The Evolution of India’s Palestine Policy”, \textit{op cit.} No. 258, p. 91.
\end{enumerate}
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Others viewed normalisation as a betrayal of the traditional Indian commitment to the Palestine cause\(^{266}\). Some portrayed the decision as an anti-Muslim alliance, if not a conspiracy\(^{267}\).

Although not everyone was happy with normalization, it had ceased to be a contentious issue in India and even parties which initially opposed normalisation such as the Communist Parties and Janata Dal, slowly recognised the need to engage and cooperate with Israel. The veteran Communist leaders such as the then Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu and Somnath Chatterjee even visited Israel in the summer of 2000\(^{268}\).

**Impact of India Israel Relationship on India’s Support to Palestine**

Although India’s relation with Israel started at a low profile during the Congress regime, the relations between the two countries reached new heights during the BJP led National Democratic Alliance regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). During the Kargil War of 1999 when

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\(^{267}\) Indian left parties depicted Indo-Israeli ties as a conspiracy against Muslims. Also see Bansidhar Pradhan, “India’s Policy Towards the PLO” *op cit.*, No. 148, p. 81.

\(^{268}\) In summer 2000, the Chairperson of the India Israel Parliamentary Friendship League, Somnath Chatterjee, a leader of the Communist party in India (CPI) who became the Speaker of Lok Sabha in 2004, visited Israel, accompanied by the former Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu. This visit was interpreted that even the Indian Left wing and Communist Parties were no longer opposed to ties with Israel. For more this visit see Subodh Ghildiya, ‘Jyoti, Somnath visited Israel’, *The Pioneer*, (New Delhi), 9 June 2004.
Pakistani intruders had taken up positions on the higher reaches of the Kargil mountains, Israel responded quickly to India’s requests for arms and sent Heron and Searcher unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, to locate and identify the Pakistani-held positions. It also supplied ammunition for the Bofors field guns and night vision equipment, both of which played key roles in the conflict. Thereafter, the Indian Home Minister, L.K. Advani and External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh visited Israel in quick succession in May 2000 and June 2000 respectfully followed by the state visit of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003. In addition to this, India’s National Security Advisor, Brijesh Mishra and Services Chiefs had also visited the Jewish country underlining the growing strategic


270 A series of bilateral visits between Indian and Israeli political leaders took place starting in 1992. This included: The Israeli Finance Minister Shimon Peres in May 1993; President Ezer Weizman in January 1997; Finance Minister Shimon Peres in January 2002; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003; Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in February 2004; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Industry and Labor Eliyahu (Eli) Yishai in December 2006; Minister of Transport and Road Safety Shaul Mofaz in March 2007; Interior Minister Meir Sheetrit in November 2007; and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Shalom Simchon in January 2008.

Significant visits by Indian leaders included the following: Home Minister L. K. Advani in June 2000; Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh in July 2000; Minister of State of Science and Technology and Minister of Earth Sciences Kapil Sibal in May 2005; Minister of State for Housing and Tourism Kumari Selja in September 2005; Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar in May 2006; Minister of Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath in November 2005; Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar in May 2006; Minister of State of Industry Ashwani Kumar in August 2007; Minister of State for Railways R. Velu in December 2007; former Indian President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam in February 2008; Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan in December 2008; Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal and the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Shri Prem Kumar Dhumal in November 2009; Minister of Commerce Jyotiraditya Scindia (to discuss a free trade agreement) in February 2010. For more see Embassy of India, Tel Aviv website at http://www.indembassy.co.il/India-Israel%20Bilateral%20relations.htm
cooperation between the two countries\textsuperscript{271}. When the United Progressive Alliance Government under the Congress leadership came to power in mid-2004, it decided to follow the same line of the policy adopted by the earlier NDA regime but without compromising India’s traditional support to Palestine\textsuperscript{272}.

At present, India is Israel’s closest ally with strategic, defence and intelligence cooperation growing rapidly between the two countries. India has become the biggest market for Israeli arms. Israel provides India with missile radar, border monitoring equipment and other similar high-tech military hardwires. In addition, several thousand Indian soldiers have been provided with “anti-insurgency training in Israel”\textsuperscript{273}. These growing ties between India and Israel which some have dubbed as a ‘strategic

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{271} Subhash Kapila, “India – Israel Relations: The Imperatives For Enhanced Strategic Cooperation” South Asia Analysis Group Paper available at: http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers2%5Cppaper131.html
\item \textsuperscript{272} 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”. (\textit{The Pioneer}, 21 June 2004) Natwar K. Singh the new Minister of External Affairs 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).
\item \textsuperscript{273} For an excellent piece on this see “Indo-Israel Military Relations” available at: http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/Indo-Israel-D.pdf. Also see Ahmed Abdel Halim, “The Indo-Israel Military Relationship and its Impact on the Arab World”, Middle East Round Table, Edition 18 Volume 1 - November 20, 2003 available at: http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&id=18#72
\end{itemize}
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partnership and its consequent effect on New Delhi’s posture towards Palestine have generated another lively debate in the country. There are two different viewpoints on this issue. According to one view, India’s growing ties with Israeli has neutralised its traditional support to the Palestine issue. The other view argues that India’s friendship with Israel has not affected its support to the Palestinian cause.

Those who subscribe to the first viewpoint argue that there has been a discernible shift in India’s Palestine policy since 1992. They charge the Government for injecting a serious distortion to India’s position on West Asian crisis by ignoring the beleaguered Palestinians and their just cause for building up a ‘special relationship’ with Israel. This they believe is a negation of national sentiment and a shameful interlude in India’s longstanding traditional relations with West Asian countries. The new approach they think has reduced India’s stand on Israel-Palestinian conflict to a state of voiceless impotence.

The Indian response to the PLO after the commencement of the diplomatic relation with Israel is cited to validate this argument. In this regard, it is argued that while there are hectic activities for strengthening of relationship between India and Israel, the same is not done with regard to

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274 P.R. Kumaraswamy is one of them. See his policy paper for more, India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership, Mideast Security and Policy Studies, No. 40, September 1998 available at http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/publications/40pub.html

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Palestine. It is also pointed out that in the light of the emerging tempo of relationship between India and Israel, the Indian policy makers have failed to keep themselves in tune with the negative developments in the Israeli-PLO negotiations. The Hebron massacre, the inordinate delay in starting autonomy process, frequent and long time closure of Israeli borders, non-release of the Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails and reluctance in starting election process in the occupied territories, are instances of Israeli non-compliances with the letter and spirit of the Oslo Peace Accord signed in September 1993. India’s non-response to these developments is contrary to its earlier activist stand on Palestine. Hence, India’s Palestine policy, in its present phase, has turned to be, in effect, a ‘no policy’ at all.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, a senior Congress leader and a Member of Parliament thinks that a strong relationship with Israel deviates from the Nehruvian foreign policy of un-stinted support to the Palestinians. He argues that in 1947, India was the only country which stood against the partition of Palestine. Yet, today’s Indian establishment is opposed to what India has historically stood for, vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Harkishan Singh Surjeet, thought that the government had reversed the national consensus that characterised India's foreign policy. The Communist Party

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of India leader A.B. Bardhan regretted that "the Government of India had let down an old friend" (Palestine)\textsuperscript{276}. According to Prakash Karat, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) who succeeded Surjeet, India's deep military ties with Israel has undermined its pro-Palestine policy. In his view, "We have to break the strong collaboration with Israel, stop the tilt, reverse the ties and restore India's independent foreign policy." "Ties with Israel, which are harmful, have to be reviewed," he mentioned, calling on the government to "come clean" and "spell out its stand on Palestine"\textsuperscript{277}.

Jayati Ghosh lamented there was a time when India was seen, internationally, as an originator and major force in the Non-Aligned Movement, a leader of the developing world, and generally a bulwark against imperialism. Much has changed since then\textsuperscript{278}.

According to Bansidhar Pradhan ‘even though it would be an extreme statement to maintain that India has totally abandoned the


Palestine cause subsequent to the high profile and fast developing robust partnership between Israel and India, there has been an evident dilution in India’s traditional consistent, unequivocal and strong political support for the Palestine struggle against Israel. From one of total identification with the Palestinian struggle for their legitimate rights to an independent statehood by unequivocally opposing Israeli policies against the Palestinians at every multilateral fora during the Cold War period, India has come to adopt the so-called policy of equidistance in the Israel Palestine conflict during the post-Cold War era. Even this policy has often been marked by a subtle tilt towards Israel especially during the BJP-led NDA regime on the grounds of internal security and anti-terrorism cooperation. In a way the dilution of India’s Palestine policy has been built into the very logic of the growing strategic relationship between India and Israel279.

Malik Tauqir Ahmad Khan is of the view that India has managed a comfort level with Israel which signifies the substantive recession in India’s interest in the Palestine question. Indian vocal posturing on Palestine issue during pre-independence and post-independence Nehruvian period has virtually ceased after the end of Cold War with official pronouncements

leaning more towards the restoration of peace in the region than an active call for recognizing Palestinian rights\textsuperscript{280}.

Aijaz Ahmed points out how the position of the leadership of the Indian National Congress on Palestine has changed over the decades. Gandhi had unambiguously recognised the rights of Palestinian people on their land, a view which was later championed by Nehru and his followers in the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the official Indian position has shifted since the 1990s towards closer ties with Israel. He linked the shift with the emergence of Hindutva and neo-liberalism and fall of the socialist block\textsuperscript{281}.

Shamir Hasan blames the NDA Government for breaking free from all the earlier constraints, including the earlier close ties with the Palestinian movement, in pursuing its close friendship with Israel. He accused India’s policy on Palestine as ‘deceptive’ and the UPA Government’s commitment to Palestine cause as a ‘paper commitment’\textsuperscript{282}.

Syed Sultan Mohiddin argues that having been in the forefront of support for Palestinians’ freedom fight for decades, India’s lukewarm response to Israel’s massive Gaza offensive is an indication of strategic

\textsuperscript{280} Malik Tauqir Ahmad Khan “Palestine Question and India’s Israel Policy” Journal of Research (Humanities) Vol. 27, 2007, p.31.


shift in the country’s foreign policy. He blames India’s ‘enlightened self-interest’ with Israel as the main reason for this shift\textsuperscript{283}.

Sushil J. Aaron is of the view that India has moved from a very publicly orchestrated pro-Arab, pro-Palestine policy during the Cold War to a translation of backchannel interactions with Israelis into an unstated but discernible alliance. That India has attained a comfort level with Israel to contemplate inviting Sharon for a visit, despite its negative symbolic import for proponents of a free Palestine in the region signifies the substantive recession in India’s interest on the Palestine question. He alleged that Indian posturing on the Palestinian question has virtually ceased, with official pronouncements leaning more towards the restoration of peace in the region than an active call for recognizing Palestinian rights, with the latter being a rhetorical fallback position rather than a notion that permeates official discourse as was the case during the Cold War\textsuperscript{284}.

C Rajamohan writes, “for nearly four decades, India could find nothing right about Israel. Now it seems New Delhi cannot say anything

\textsuperscript{283} Syed Sultan Mohiddin, “Palestine Conflict and India’s Response”, Radiance Views Weekly, November 14, 2010.

critical about Tel Aviv”. K.M. Sajad Ibrahim states that India’s changed policy since 1992 is a blatant contradiction to its avowed policy of supporting the Palestinian cause. To him, the current phase of India’s relation with Israel goes beyond the level of normalcy and reached a stage of much clandestine cooperation for defence and strategic purposes. He concludes that the new diplomatic initiatives of India target only its vested interest against the traditional principle of solidarity with the third world countries.

According to Sunaina Maira, India and Israel’s new honeymoon reversed India’s historical stand of support for the Palestinians who were still living under occupation and apartheid and ignored India’s own experience with colonization. This is despite the fact that Israel continues to maintain its military, political, and economic stranglehold on Palestinians who still do not live in a fully sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza, or in a truly democratic nation in Israel.

Pointing to the shift in the Indian policy on Palestine, Zafarul Islam Khan, the editor of Mille Gazette says that India’s commitment to the struggle of the Palestinians had now remained confined to paying just lip service. Commenting on the increasing business and military ties between India and Israel, he


287 Sunaina Maira, “India Loses Her Palestinian Heart and Gains a Calculating Israeli Mind” available at: http://wakeupfromyourslumber.com/node/8522
mentions that nobody is averse to the procurement of military supplies for country’s defence but having Israel as a supplier is a morally incorrect choice\textsuperscript{288}.

According to Kapil Komireddi, India was once considered as a bastion of pro-Palestinian sentiment. Now there has been a dramatic shift in its policy from Palestine to Israel. He cites three principal reasons behind the shift in India's attitude. The first is the belated realisation that no amount of deference to Arab sentiment could alter Muslim opinion in the Middle East in India’s favour: when it came to Kashmir, Shia and Sunni united in supporting Pakistan's position. The second owes itself to the collapse of the old world order: the death of the Soviet Union meant that India had to seek out new allies. The third factor that contributed to the deepening of Indo-Israeli ties is less well-known: the rise of Hindu nationalism in India\textsuperscript{289}. The Indian chapter of the Asian People’s Solidarity for Palestine (APSP) is disappointed because there have been a marked shift in India’s approach to the Palestinian issue in the last several years as it moves closer to Israel. Though India’s official position still supports the Palestinians’

\textsuperscript{288} “Indian Muslims Observe Quds Day” article available at: http://www.jamaateislamhind.org/index.php?do=category&id=40&blockid=40&pageid=140

cause, the alliance claimed the India’s policies were favouring the Israelis with their “strategic partnership” specially in defence and security deals.\textsuperscript{290}

CPI Deputy General Secretary, S Sudhakar Reddy thinks that the Indian government run by Manmohan Singh departed from the path of non-alignment policies and started toeing the pro-American policies, which is a complete deviation of India’s foreign policies founded by their own leader Jawaharlal Nehru. The CPI leader D Raja deplores the dual role played by Indian government by saying, “One side it is supporting the Palestine cause but on the other side it is promoting ties with Israel. India should follow an independent foreign policy. The government must display a positive political role in finding a solution to the conflict in the region, which has deprived independence of Palestine.”\textsuperscript{291}

The above perception is, however, not shared by many others. Congress President and the ruling UPA Chairperson, Sonia Gandhi during a speech at Oxford University in November 2002, for instance, stated that “growing economic and strategic cooperation between India and Israel does not make (the party) insensitive” to “the reality of the legitimate


Concerns of the Palestinian people. Outlining the policy of the new UPA Government, President A P J Abdul Kalam in his address to the joint session of the Indian Parliament said, ‘Our relations with Israel, which have developed on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation, are important, but this in no way dilutes our principled support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Indian officials similarly insist that the relationship with Israel and the symbolic neglect of Palestine will not affect relations with the Arab world. One official confidently affirms that “The Arab world also knows that national interest is supreme. Our close ties with Israel do not affect our equally warm relations with the Arab world”. Pointedly, Ministry of External Affairs officials make the comparison with China’s engagement of the Middle East. “The Arabs have had no problem with China’s defence ties with Israel”. In the words of one analyst, “India sees China’s Middle East strategy of close ties with the Arabs and the Israelis as an approach from which it can learn.”

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293 President Abdul Kalam’s address to the Joint Session of Parliament, 7 June 2004, Office of the President of India, New Delhi available at: http://presidentofindia.nic.in/scripts/palatest1.jsp?id=6.

294 “Israel ‘gifts’ India infantry weapons,” Indian Express, July 5, 2002.


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According to Yashwant Sinha, the former Indian Foreign Minister, Palestinians are not in any doubt about Indian policy. “The problem arises only with those people inside India and outside India who are more Palestinian than the Palestinian themselves”\(^{296}\).

Muchkund Dubey, the former Foreign Secretary, advocates that “India has over the years established a very meaningful relationship with Israel, which is admirably serving its interests. Israel has been more than forthcoming in response to India’s several requests for cooperation and has not always sought strict or instant reciprocity. He suggests that India should take a nuanced position on issues affecting Israel and take positions after judging issues on merits. Its reaction needs not be automatic or on the same pattern all the time on all issues”.\(^{297}\)

According to Kumarswami, the Indo-Israeli relations have not undermined the traditional Indian support for the Palestinians. It is still committed to the full realization of the political rights of the Palestinians and endorses their demand for full statehood and sovereignty. It views the formation of two sovereign states in the erstwhile Mandate Palestine as the only just and viable solution to the problem. It disapproves of any unilateral moves or solution and urges both parties to seek a comprehensive peace

\(^{296}\) Cited in Ramananda Sengupta, “India Walks a Tightrope in its Relations with Israel, Arab Nations”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, July 2010.

through negotiation. On a number of key issues such as border, refugees, security fence, settlements, water or Jerusalem, India’s positions are at variance with Israel. It has publicly disapproved harsh Israeli measures such as targeted killings, civilian casualties, prolonged border closures, house demolitions and land confiscations directed against the Palestinians. Even while criticizing terror attacks against Israeli civilians, India was equally critical of Israeli actions against the Palestinians during the Gaza conflict (2008-09). At the bilateral level, India continues to recognize the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority as the legitimate Palestinian representatives. Since the late 1980s it had accorded the honours of a head of state to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Following his death it bestowed similar treatment to his successor Mahmoud Abbas. It maintains a diplomatic mission in the Palestinian territories. Its limited political leverage does not prevent New Delhi from offering medical, material and education-related aid and assistance to the Palestinians. Thus, he concludes that India’s bourgeoning ties with Israel has not come at the cost of its support for Palestinians.

Shalu Malik maintains that India’s relations with the people of Palestine and their just cause to regain their lost territories remains an

everlasting aspect of India’s foreign policy. Changes may be perceived in her foreign policy postures in view of the fast changing global environment and international scenario, however, these changes are mere aberrations and purely temporary. The spirit of anti – imperialism, fight against exploitation and voluntary discrimination is completely ingrained in the bone and marrow of Indian body politic: as such any deviation from the just cause of Palestinian peoples will be a negation of the fundamentals of India’s governing culture 299.

According to Shashank, a former Foreign Secretary of India, India's position on Palestine has not undergone any significant change in the wake of growing India-Israel relationship. He argues that although India-Israel had recognized each other for a long time yet there was no diplomatic relationship between the two countries for a long time, so it is only natural that their relationship would catch up. So while the growing India-Israel relationship is there, there is no change in India’s dialogue or relationship with Palestine. India has a representative in the Palestinian territories and now that it is also member of the UN Security Council, its views are welcomed by all the Arab counties and the Israelis also. So, he thinks that India’s position perhaps has become a little bit more normal because now India can interact with the Palestinians, with the Arab

countries as well as Israel\textsuperscript{300}. Palestinian Ambassador to India, Osama Musa is of the opinion that India's ties with Israel benefits Palestine in some cases. "India sent aid worth USD 2 million to Palestine. It's not easy to get the medicines across to Palestine, because India has to take them through Israel. They can't do it if they don't have good relationship with Israel" he added\textsuperscript{301}.

A careful examination of the whole discussion makes two things clear: First, since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the world has changed dramatically and so also the perception and attitude of Arab countries towards Israel. This is evident in their recognition of Israel and participation in the Middle East peace process. India's changed posture towards Israel was the result of these altered circumstances. Second, there is a tendency to interpret everything through a zero-sum approach i.e., Palestine's gain is Israel's loss and vice versa. Palestinians would not get anything if India condemns Israel all the time and completely disengages the Jewish State. What is actually important is to use India's leverage vis-à-vis Israel and work towards a just and fair solution of the Palestine problem. Moreover, it is also important for India to politically and economically help the Palestine people in their quest for a separate homeland.

\textsuperscript{300} Interview with \textit{Foreign Policy Research Centre Journal}, New Delhi, Volume-5 at: http://www.fprc.in/fprc_journal5.php

\textsuperscript{301} "India's Ties with Israel Benefits Us in Some Cases: Palestine", \textit{Zee News}, February 12, 2007 http://www.zeenews.com/news353767.html