

CONCLUSION

West Asia continues to occupy an important position in international relations due to its geo-political location. The entire region acts as a link between the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Red Sea, Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean. The vast reserves of oil have perpetually attracted special interest from the Western powers. The West Asia policy of India had primarily been shaped by its friendly relations with the Arab countries and with a view to promote its national interest. Several factors were responsible for the formation of India's policy towards the Arab world. First, India and the Arab countries have got historical and cultural affinities. Second, India's relations with Arabs had also been influenced by the nature of its relations with Pakistan. Pakistan regarded itself as closer to West Asia and always tried to project India as anti- Islamic. Third, India had extensive commercial interests with these countries. With the industrial, technological, economic and commercial developments, the importance of the area grew for India. Fourth, politically, India stood with the Arabs with regards to fighting for the liberation against Western imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and racialism.

There was gradual realisation on India's part that normal diplomatic relations with Israel need to be established anew. Various factors played their part in the dawning of this reality on the foreign policy planners of India. The manner in which the international geopolitical scene had taken its shape , made it necessary for India to review its West Asia policy in favour of Israel. Consequent upon the waning clout of Russia in the international political chessboard, India also felt the need for establishing better relations with the United States. Getting closer with the United States also had its effect in the conduct of India's relation with other countries. The national interest of India which in the opinion of the foreign policy planners of the country during that time, consisted in aligning more closely with the United States also required that India's relation with one of the closest ally of the US i.e., Israel should also be based on firm footing. This was also needed, more so, because India's consistent pro-Arab policy was not yielding the required result. Not only in the popular national imagination but also in the serious academic discourses, it was increasingly being discussed that India's pro-Arab policy was not being reciprocated in the likewise manner. Under these circumstances, which have been amply discussed

in the preceding chapters, it became very important for India to revise its west Asia policy, which meant having relation with Israel on a new footing

With the change in the international geopolitical scene and with the changing geopolitical dynamics in West Asia, India changed its policy towards Israel which was evidently marked by the normalisation of its relations with Israel. The normalisation of relations between India and Israel marked a radical shift in India's foreign policy with multifaceted consequences. Under the new post-Cold War climate and growing pre-eminence of the US, India and its leaders abandoned their blinkers and discarded the zero-sum approach towards Israel. Normalization of relations was no longer seen as an anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian measure but a sign of Indian support for the Middle East Peace Process. In the post –Madrid situation, particularly, support for the Palestinian would demand support for the peace process and normal ties with the principal player, Israel.

The establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel was not accompanied by any shift in its overall attitude towards the rights of the Palestinians. India continued to support the right of self-determination of the Palestinians would mean the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state living in peace with Israel. It reiterated its support for the PLO and treated Arafat and later on, his successor, Mahmud Abbas, as a head of state. Indeed on a host of issues pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict such as Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, borders, refugees and the Jerusalem issue there was no difference in India's pre-1992 and post-1992 positions.

Since 1992 the bilateral relations have expanded and covered a host of political, diplomatic, economic and security issues. In the initial years, it has been cautious in its approach but towards the end of 1990s relations took a significant upward turn. The formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government headed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), known for its traditional support for Israel, in 1998 significantly enhanced the bilateral relations.

Apart from the political aspect of the relations between the two countries which saw an upward surge, in the bilateral economic relation as well, there took place significant improvement since 1992. From less than US\$100 million in the late 1980s, the two-way trade has crossed the three billion mark and is gradually moving

upwards each passing year. Israel, thus, has become one of India's major trading partners in the West Asia. This growth was in contrast to India economic ties with countries such as Egypt which traditionally had closer political ties especially during the Nehru-Nasser era. In the following years, Israeli companies found India to be a good place for investment and started investing heavily in various infrastructure programs in India. There has been widespread cooperation in other traditional areas such as agriculture, water management and horticulture.

The most significant growth in the bilateral ties could be noticed in one of the most critical issues i.e., military-security ties. Israel has been identified as India's second largest arms supplier after Russia and New Delhi has emerged as the principal export destination for Israeli weapons. Upgrading of aging Soviet inventories, border management, small arms, avionics and missile are some of the major areas of cooperation. Israel has also agreed to supply India with Phalcon advanced airborne early warning systems. The US which blocked a similar deal with China was more than happy to endorse the same spy planes being supplied to India. In this regards, in July 2007 both countries entered into a US\$ 2.5 billion program to jointly develop missile defence. This marked a new phase in the security relations between the two countries. Moreover, in a major shift in January 2008 India launched Israeli spy satellite, believed to be aimed at monitoring Iran and its suspected nuclear programs. This came against the background of periodic statements of 'civilizational links' with Tehran.

Though never articulated adequately, normalization of relations was part of India's new found aspiration for great power status. Ability to pursue a foreign policy independent of the diktats of others is a prime criterion for a major power. The issue is not about a great power doing the right thing but doing what that country considers right for its interest. In this sense, normalization of relations gave an unmistakable signal to the outside world that India was prepared to pursue a policy that would serve its own national interests. While still seeing Arab and Islamic countries in friendlier terms, India was not prepared to accept their diktats over Israel. This approach is more visible in the manner in which India has been handling its relations with Iran and Israel. Both these countries have unique advantages that are vital for India. Military support from Israel and energy supplies from Iran are critical for India's economic growth and aspirations for greater influence beyond South Asia. In short, Iran could

not offer the kind of military –technological expertise it needs and Israel could not help in its search for energy security. Hence, India has been trying to de-link Iran in its Israel policy and Israel in its Iran policy.

India's realigned relation with the strategically important player of West Asia actually brought benefits to India within a very short span. During the Kargil crises, Israel's overall support had been very comforting for the Indian establishment. The Israeli aid during the Kargil war in 1999 was considered by India as a cementing factor in the Indo-Israeli relationship. This relationship was further boosted by Shimon Peres visit to India. It was during his visit to India in January 2002 that India and Israel made major agreements to fight 'terrorism'. This actually brought with it a fundamental question, which didn't go unnoticed by the serious onlookers of India's foreign policy. That question relates to the basic tenets of India's foreign policy. The word 'terrorism' used by Israel, ironically, was about the national liberation struggle of the Palestinians, which had been strongly supported by India until the late 1980s. After the visit, even an official of the Indian Foreign ministry said: "India finds it increasingly beneficial to learn from Israel's experience in dealing with terrorism". This line of Indian policy was rightly observed by many as a contradiction with the fundamental principle of Indian foreign policy i.e., supporting all national liberation movements.

Another important event in the Indo-Israeli relationship was the visit of Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon to India in September 2003. In fact, the visit engineered much controversy in the wake of the assassination of Palestinian leaders by Israeli military forces during the period. There were series of protests in different parts of India against the Israeli Prime Minister. However, the Indian government adopted a cautious step of either displeasing Sharon or giving much honour against the public sentiments. At the same time, there were many agreements during his visit as Sharon was accompanied by a large delegation of about 30 influential businessmen, eager to forge new contracts and open new markets in India.

With the change in regime, as it is usually expected in the conduct of India's foreign policy, not much change was brought in the existing relations between the two countries. The same line of foreign policy was continued. It is worth pointing out that during the NDA rule the Congress party had criticized some of the close cooperation

between India and Israel. But UPA government followed its relations with Israel without changing any policies. This shows the political maturity of the foreign policy establishment of the country. India's Naval Chief Admiral Suresh Mehta visited Israel in January 2008 to finalise several key defence projects. It was reported that Mehta had reviewed efforts to enhance the Israeli-origin Barak missiles defence system.

This study, apart from highlighting the geopolitical and economic factors which led to the boost in the Indo-Israel relations also adequately brings forth the role of different interest groups in the realignment of India's relation with Israel. The trader and business lobby in India and Israel, particularly, played a crucial role in fostering the ties between the two countries for promoting their interests although Palestinians had very little to offer to the Indian business group. Thus, Israel proved far more beneficial to India but it was imperative for India to align more closely with the "valuable" Israel. This is clearly reflected in terms of balance of trade between the two countries. The official Israel figures show that Israel exports to India valued US\$ 1,270 billion in 2006 and imports US\$ 1.433 billion to Israel. Agricultural, water and IT technologies in addition to fertilizers and diamonds had been the major mutual trade concerns. The State Bank of India became the first foreign bank to open a branch in Israel's diamond exchange.

The India-Israeli alliance also strengthens the US strategic designs for India and the region. India holds significant place in the September 20, 2002 National Security Strategy of the US, a policy document to support the actions of the then US President, George Bush. Like Israel in West Asia, the US needed a close ally in South Asia to confront terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as to overcome the challenges posed by China. The Indo-US nuclear deal is the most significant outcome of this kind of policy initiatives of the United States.

"Pakistan factor" was another aspect which cemented the relation between India and Israel. For India, the growing nuclear arsenal of Pakistan and its support to terrorism in Kashmir and different parts of India had been one of the most important challenges. In the case of Israel, the nuclear capability of Pakistan and its support to Palestinian extremists posed a threat to its security. In this context Pakistan was a common threat to India and Israel and any alliance in this direction was considered as most valuable.

Though never articulated adequately, normalization of relations was part of India's new found aspiration for great power status. Ability to pursue a foreign policy independent of the diktats of others is a prime criterion for a major power. The issue is not about a great power doing the right thing but doing what that country considers right for its interest. In this sense, normalization of relations gave an unmistakable signal to the outside world that India was prepared to pursue a policy that would serve its own national interests. While still seeing Arab and Islamic countries in friendlier terms, India was not prepared to accept their diktats over Israel. This approach is more visible in the manner in which India has been handling its relations with Iran and Israel. Both these countries have unique advantages that are vital for India. Military support from Israel and energy supplies from Iran are critical for India's economic growth and aspirations for greater influence beyond South Asia. In short, Iran could not offer the kind of military –technological expertise it needs and Israel could not help in its search for energy security. Hence, India has been trying to de-link Iran in its Israel policy and Israel in its Iran policy.

India's relationship with the West Asian countries, specially Iran, has been a point of contention in the Indo-Israeli partnership. Israel's relationship with Iran is extremely antagonistic and unstable. Israel viewed Iran as the most important threat to its security in the region due to the kind of support it extended to Hezbollah and Palestinian extremists. In the case of India, Iran is considered as the most important ally in the region. India paid a lot of respect to Iran on account of its support to Kashmir issue against Pakistan. So India treated Iran as an ideal power in the region to counter Pakistan influence in West Asia. But with the inception of Indo-Israeli ties, India's traditional relationship with Iran got badly damaged. Israel's spy satellite, Teqsar (Polaris), was launched by India in January 2008 to enhance Israel's intelligence gathering capability. In fact, the real objective behind the launching of the satellite was to undermine the Iranian nuclear programme. Moreover, India voted twice on the IAEA governing body against Iran under the compulsion from the United States. All these created rifts between India and Iran.

India, however, tried to manage its relation with both these countries by very tactfully balancing the tightrope of international politics. India couldn't let go of the Arab countries for obvious reasons. It is estimated that more than five million Indian expatriate work in the Arab countries. Moreover, nearly US\$ 25 billion worth of Indo-

Arab trade, including 60 percent of Indian oil and gas imports worth US\$ 20 billion, is the basic support of India economy. In this respect, India had to follow a soft policy towards the question of Palestine because it has all through been a very emotive issue for the Arabs. In order to overcome this dilemma India's foreign policy makers attempted to separate its Israeli policy from the Arab-Israeli conflict. To realize this objective, India took a more tactical neutral position on the Palestinian question, publicly stating its continued support for the Palestinian cause and making a deliberative effort to further strengthen ties with Arab neighbours. This is more evident from India's attitude during the Israeli invasion of Gaza Strip in January 2009 in which more than 1000 Palestinians were killed. India was ready to condemn the attack only in a mild manner without affecting the normal relations. This was questioned by some Indian political parties, especially the left wing groups.

As a result of India's new foreign policy decisions, its traditional line of supporting national liberation movements and anti-colonial and anti-imperial stands seems to have fizzled out. The Palestinians have been waging a struggle for their nationhood for the last six decades against Israeli illegal occupation of lands. India was one of the leading countries which extended all support to the Palestinian cause. India has always opposed the continued illegal occupation of West Bank and Gaza. However, India's changed policy since 1992 is a blatant contradiction to its avowed policy of supporting the Palestinian cause due to the transformation in the international politics resulted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Moreover, India had enough justifications in establishing ties with Israel by taking into account of the factors like the recognition of Israel by the P.L.O. and some Arab countries. However, 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. As has been discussed in details in the earlier chapter, India wants to borrow the ideas of Israeli tactics of eliminating the Palestinian leaders in its efforts to combat terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. For a long period India had been condemning these Israeli policies against the Palestinians. Now the cooperation in the same field with Israel is against its foreign policy principle and the support to the Palestinian struggle.

Moreover, India never used its relations with Israel to resolve the issue of Palestinians. At present India is in a commanding position of using its good offices to

influence Israel. However, no attempt was made to pressurize Israel to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories. Since 1992 India was not ready to condemn Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians by sticking to a passive stand of supporting a 'peaceful solution' to the crisis. The new diplomatic initiatives of India target only its interest against the traditional principle of solidarity with the third world countries. The current trends indicate India's keen interest to develop close ties with imperialist global powers like the United States for economic and defence benefits which may undermine its democratic values and principles.

The growing ties between these two nations has even been termed as 'natural alliance', though, doesn't come without the cautionary note pointed out by some serious observers of international politics who rightly view power in international relations in broader sense. According to this view, in the immediate context of growing Indo- Israel ties, what came at stake was India's philosophical base of its foreign policy. Enlightened self-interest must obviously be the guiding principle of the foreign policy of any country, but that enlightened national interest must be formulated with broader mind and visionary outlook. The immediate compulsions of the international geopolitics should pragmatically not blur the long term vision of the philosophical base of any nation's foreign policy. In the history of nations, it is sometimes very important to stand for something which may not be so fruitful in the immediate context.