

# The Israel Factor in Growing Indo-US Strategic Ties

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**Abstract:** Indo-Israel strategic ties have been growing at a great pace in the last few decades and this growth is stimulating interests and concerns among foreign policy makers as well as in academia. India under Nehru maintained a very strict stance vis-à-vis Israel's Palestine policy. Being a part of and the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nehru was critical of injustice done to Palestinians and the US role in consolidating the state of Israel. India's growing intimacy with Israel, starting from 1990s, is seen as a major divergence from the policy set by the country's founding fathers. Close diplomatic and defense ties somehow exhibit the geostrategic needs of both the countries as well as the requirement of time where systematic changes have taken place in the post-Cold War period. The disintegration of the Soviet Union left no option for India but to pursue a more pragmatic policy towards the United States, the new hegemon, and its allies. The Jewish lobby in the US Congress was of great support to put forward India's agendas and to counter opponents. India reciprocated for that goodwill diplomacy by strengthening its ties with Israel. Post-Cold War growth of Indo-US strategic relations has many regional and global dimensions and vested interests. These interests are better served in geostrategic collaboration with Israel or making a mutual interest based informal alliance (Indo-US-Israel triangle for balancing the threat in Asia) between three countries. The cordial ties between Israel and the US facilitate India forwarding its regional and global agendas from the very platform of friendship. Therefore, the research problem at hand is to dissect and understand the trilateral bond based on its balancing the threat in the region and how it is the source of convergence for all three of them. In brief, this paper is an attempt to understand the very basis of growing Indo-Israel relations and the role that this strategic partnership plays in facilitating the cordial ties between the US and India in the post-Cold War era.

**Key Words:** India, Israel, US, Strategic Partnership, Palestine, Post-Cold War, Pakistan

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# Gelişen Hindistan-ABD Stratejik İlişkisinde İsrail Faktörü

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**Öz:** Hint-İsrail stratejik ilişkileri son birkaç yılda büyük bir hızla büyümekte ve bu büyümeye, politika yapıcılardan yanı sıra akademide de ilgi ve endişeleri beraberinde getirmektedir. Nehru yönetimindeki Hindistan, İsrail'in Filistin politikasına karşı çok katı bir duruş sergilemiş ve Bağlantısızlar Hareketi'nin bir parçası ve lideri olan Nehru Filistinlilere yapılan adaletsiz tutumu ve ABD'nin İsrail devletini destekleyici rolünü eleştirmiştir. Hindistan'ın 1990'lardan başlayarak İsrail'le olan yakınlığı ülkenin kurucularının belirlediği politikadan büyük bir sapma olarak görülmektedir. Yakın diplomatik ve savunma bağları bir şekilde her iki ülkenin jeostratejik ihtiyaçlarını ve Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde sistematik değişikliklerin gerçekleştiği zamanın gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması Hindistan'a Amerika Birleşik Devletleri hegemonyası ve müttefiklerine karşı daha pragmatik bir politika izlemekten başka bir seçenek bırakmamıştır. ABD Kongresi'ndeki Yahudi lobisi Hindistan'ın gündemini ve karıştırmayı muhaliflerini ortaya koymak için büyük destek sağlamış ve Hindistan İsrail ile ilişkilerini güçlendirerek bu iyi niyet diplomasisine karşılık vermiştir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası büyüyen Hint-ABD stratejik ilişkileri birçok bölgesel, küresel boyuta ve kazanılmış çıkarlara sahiptir. Bu çıkarlar İsrail ile jeostratejik iş birliğinde veya karşılıklı menfaat temelli gayri resmi bir ittifakta (Asya'daki tehdidi dengelemek için Hint-ABD-İsrail üçgeni) ve üç ülke arasında gerçekleşmektedir. İsrail ve ABD arasındaki samimi bağlar Hindistan'ın bölgesel ve küresel gündemini dostluk platformundan iletmesini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Bu noktadan hareketle ortaya çıkan bu araştırma bölgedeki tehdidi dengelemeye ve bunların üçü için yakınsama kaynağının nasıl olduğuna dayanan üç taraflı bağı incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, araştırmanın amacı Hint-İsrail ilişkilerinde büyümeyen temelini ve bu stratejik ortaklığun Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD ile Hindistan arasındaki samimi bağları kolaylaştırmada oynadığı rolü anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hindistan, İsrail, ABD, Stratejik Ortaklık, Filistin, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası, Pakistan

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# العامل الإسرائيلي في العلاقات الاستراتيجية المتطرفة بين الهند والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

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## ملخص

تشهد العلاقات الاستراتيجية بين الهند وإسرائيل نموا متتسراً خلال السنوات القليلة الماضية، وهذا النمو يثير معه الاهتمامات والقلق في الأوساط الأكademية، إضافة لصانعي السياسة. كان للهند في عهد نهرو موقف صارم جداً ضد السياسات الإسرائيلية تجاه فلسطين. كما أن نهرو الذي كان جزءاً من حركة عدم الانحياز ورئيساً لها انتقد المواقف غير العادلة تجاه فلسطين والدور الأمريكي الداعم لدولة إسرائيل. ينظر إلى تقارب الهند مع إسرائيل بدايةً من تسعينيات القرن الماضي على أنه انحراف كبير عن السياسة التي وضعها مؤسس الدولة. الروابط الدبلوماسية والدفاعية الوثيقة، كشفت الاحتياجات الجيوستراتيجية لكلا البلدين بشكل من الأشكال وضرورات الوقت الذي تحقق فيها التغيرات المنهجية في حقبة ما بعد الحرب الباردة. لم يترك تقكك الاتحاد السوفييتي للهند خياراً سوى اتباع سياسة أكثر براغماتية تجاه هيمنة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وحلفائها. قدم اللوبي اليهودي في الكونغرس الأمريكي دعماً كبيراً لأجندة الهند ولكشف المعارضين المناهضين لها، فيما استجابت الهند دبلوماسياً للنوايا الحسنة هذه من خلال تعزيز علاقاتها مع إسرائيل. العلاقات الاستراتيجية بين الهند والولايات المتحدة التي نمت بعد الحرب الباردة، لها العديد من الأبعاد الإقليمية والعالمية والمصالح المكتسبة. هذه المصالح تتحقق في اتفاق غير رسمي في إطار التعاون الجيوستراتيجي مع إسرائيل أو على أساس المصالح المتبادلة، وبين الدول الثلاث (المثلث الهندي الأمريكي الإسرائيلي من أجل موازنة التهديدات في آسيا). الروابط الحميمة بين إسرائيل والولايات المتحدة تسهل للهند نقل أجندتها الإقليمية والعالمية عبر منصة الصداقة. هذه الدراسة التي انبثقت من هذه النقطة تهدف إلى تناول الروابط ثلاثة الأطراف، بناءً على موازنة التهديدات في المنطقة وكيفية مصدر التقارب للدول الثلاث. وفي هذا السياق، فإن هدف الدراسة هو فهم أساس نمو العلاقات الهندية الإسرائيلية والدور الذي لعبته هذه الشراكة الاستراتيجية في تسهيل العلاقات الحميمة بين الولايات المتحدة والهند في فترة ما بعد الحرب الباردة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الهند، إسرائيل، الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، الشراكة الاستراتيجية، فلسطين، ما بعد الحرب الباردة، باكستان.

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## Introduction

India's foreign policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s went through many changes. These changes diverted India away from the Nehruvian ideals of advocating the rights of people under colonial (imperialist) agendas or being deprived of their free will to decide their future (Nehru's Panchsheel; the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, a treaty signed between Jawaharlal Nehru and his Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai in 1952 in order to work together for peace in the region on the backdrop of decolonization of the subcontinent and later these five principles were adopted by the United Nation's General Assembly in 1957).<sup>1</sup> Global happenings ultimately forced Indian policy makers to adjust with the prevailing international system and adopt changes in the context of the end of Cold War and the triumph of an open market capitalist economy. The breakup of the Soviet Union compelled India to have more friendly ties with the US to fulfill its economic and defense needs. These changes molded the ways the country dealt with the outside world in the past and in its thinking about India's role in the current scenario.

India under Nehru initially had not recognized Israel as the nationalist Indian leadership was of a view that Israel is the product of colonial imperial powers and its creation would be a threat to regional peace in the Middle East. In the 1950s, though India recognized Israel, it maintained a distance and showed no enthusiasm in developing closer diplomatic ties. Meanwhile during the 1960s, the Indian leadership's (especially Indira Gandhi's) friendly ties with the PLO's (Palestine Liberation Organization) leader Yasser Arafat and recognition of Palestine's independence led to the opening of the PLO's embassy in New Delhi.<sup>2</sup> Other than ideological differences with the US and UK which supported Israel, there were some more domestic and global factors behind India's distance from Israel. One of the factors was the presence of a considerably big number of Muslims at home and India's close ties with Israel could have provoked a reaction from them. Nehru explained this to Israeli ambassador Eliahu Elath during his US visit in October 1949 that how the Indian Muslims had concerns about the Israel-Palestine dispute and how it had been 'a constant source of agitation'. Indian Muslims' sensitivity regarding the Palestine question made Nehru more thoughtful of India's choices vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>3</sup> Another factor that contributed in not having very warm diplomatic terms with Israel was India's dependence on the Gulf states' (Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and UAE) energy resources. The Indian migrant work-force in Gulf States was/is responsible for huge remittances back home: in terms of remittances to India, the total share of remittances from "Saudi Arabia was \$11.2 billion, Kuwait \$4.6 billion, Qatar \$4.1 billion, Oman \$3.3 billion and UAE \$13.8 billion in 2018."<sup>4</sup> Hence, economic and energy security forced India to not develop cordial ties with Israel soon after independence. India's leading role in the non-aligned movement and representation of the third world (former colonies and newly independent mostly Muslim majority countries) also made it imperative for the country to avoid building close diplomatic ties with Israel as it could have caused a strong reaction against India. Pakistan (India's arch rival) also could have used Indo-Israel close ties in its favor as it enjoyed good relations with the Muslim world especially with the Arab countries<sup>5</sup> and played an active role in bringing Muslim leaders together on the Palestine question in the second Islamic Summit Conference 1974 held in Lahore. Throughout the Cold War period India was careful in making any policy that could contradict the

1 For details please see, Panchsheel-The Ministry of External Affairs India. Accessed [http://www.meaindia.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191\\_panchsheel.pdf](http://www.meaindia.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191_panchsheel.pdf) also, Neville Maxwell. Jawaharlal Nehru: Of Pride and Principle. *Foreign Affairs* 52/3 (1974): 634-43.

2 Ashok Sharma & Dov Bing, India Israel Relations: The Evolving Partnership. *Israel Affairs*, 21:4 (2015): 621.

3 P. R. Kumaraswamy, India's *Israel Policy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 152.

4 Anisur Rahman, The important role of Indian diaspora in country's Gulf policy. *Financial Express*, 21 Aug 2019.

5 Shashank Joshi quoted in Navras Jaat Aafreedi. *The Impact of Domestic Politics on India's Attitudes towards Israel and Jews* in Priya Singh and Susmita Bhattacharya, eds., Perspectives on West Asia: The Evolving Geopolitical Discourses (Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2012), 103.

country's non-aligned status. And having any active engagement with Israel could have a negative impact on its role of representing the concerns of the third world.

In the years leading to and after the end of the Cold War during the Congress government under Rajiv Gandhi (1984 to 1989), India started to open towards Israel. The early 1990s proved to be a turning point for India's ties with Israel. It was the same period when India, after the disintegration of Soviet Union, was looking towards the US and allies for defense and financial needs. The end of the Cold War bipolar politics and power struggle changed the terms and conditions of international engagements for India. The new global order (unipolar world order as defined by Charles Krauthammer 1991 and Michael Mastanduno 1997) facilitated India in coming out of its stagnant socio-political and economic preferences at home and abroad. The changing domestic political scenario contributed significantly towards the new outlook of India's foreign policy vis-à-vis the US and Israel. The emergence of new political parties and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi brought the Indian National Congress' monopoly in Indian politics to an end. New political parties were more supportive of neoliberal open market capitalist economy unlike Nehru and Indira Gandhi's socialist economic policies as neoliberal capitalist policies happened to serve their interests better than socialism in a country with a rising middle class.<sup>6</sup> They were also more willing to strengthen ties with the western block to forward their agenda of India's leading role in the region and in the world. Here it is worth mentioning that initially India remained highly reluctant to bow down to the new political order as the country's leadership was trying to maintain its so-called independent status of non-alignment and any political terms with the US and its allies could have meant to accept their monopoly in policy making as well. But these efforts to remain independent of hegemonic dictation couldn't last long in the wake of the acute balance of payment crisis of 1991 when India had to consult the IMF and World Bank for financial assistance and a structural adjustment program.<sup>7</sup> Under the IMF conditions, India had to accept changes in its economic as well as political system. The adoption of the new economic and political system made it imperative for India to get connected with the US and its allies. In that context, India under Rajiv Gandhi in late 1980s showed her willingness to engage with Israel diplomatically. The Israeli consulate was established in Bombay (now Mumbai) and bilateral sports and other activities were initiated.<sup>8</sup> Post 1990, India was trying to appease the US and for that they pursued all available strategic maneuvers. Indian officials, lobbyists and the corporate sector tried to engage the Jewish lobbies (Jewish Institute of National Security Affairs (JINSA) and American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in the US Congress to bring the countries close and extract financial and defense benefits.<sup>9</sup> It had become compulsory for India to recognize the state of Israel and compromise on her very good ties with Arab states. The appeasement of the US-based Jewish lobbies helped India achieve its goal of overcoming the Cold War period's distances with the US. This in turn played a vital role in bringing all three countries closer for more comprehensive bilateral and trilateral cooperation in different fields and gave the US an edge to influence the India-Israel relations.

Bilateral relations between Israel further improved in the early 1990s when India opened its embassy in Israel in 1992. India's dependence on the US increased with time first in the face of the balance of payment crisis and later for defense equipment and financial support, and so did its ties with Israel.<sup>10</sup> During the Gulf

6 Vincent Pollard, "State Capitalism, Contentious Politics and Large-Scale Social Change." Eds. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 114-115.

7 Valerie Cerra and Sweta Chaman Saxena, What Caused the 1991 Currency Crisis in India? *IMF Staff Papers*, 49:3 (2002) 395-421, Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/staffp/2002/03/pdf/cerra.pdf>

8 P. R. Kumaraswamy, op.cit., 227-233.

9 Farah Naaz, "Indo-Israel relations: An evolutionary perspective." *Strategic Analysis* 23: 2 (1999): 245.

10 Please see Nicolas Blarel. Assessing US Influence over India-Israel Relations: A Difficult Equation to Balance?, *Strategic Analysis*, 41:4 (2017):394.

War India was clearly on the US side against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and that decision clearly paved a way for close Indo-Israel relations. Besides this, India's economic crisis in 1991 demanded effective communication with Jewish lobbies in the US to get urgent loans and bailout packages from the IMF and, for that, India's friendly ties with Israel were of utmost importance.<sup>11</sup> As a goodwill gesture India supported the US-led moves in the United Nations General Assembly to revoke the Resolution 3379 that was adopted in November 1975 which equates Zionism with racism.<sup>12</sup> In high level meetings between the officials of both countries the Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) to further enhance and improve bilateral ties and multilateral cooperation were discussed.<sup>13</sup>

Israel has become the top defense exporter to India and, unlike Israel-China defense exchanges (In 2004, the George W. Bush administration forced Israel to back away from its deal with China on upgrading the Harpy missile system, which China had purchased from Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) in 1994 for about \$55 million. The deal was considered a security threat by the US as the missile system contains American technology<sup>14</sup>), but as Harsh V. Pant observes, India-Israel collaboration and trade of weapons does not bother the US because of mutual interests and US' trust in India in regional affairs.<sup>15</sup>

India is a big market for Israel's sophisticated defense industry and the go-ahead gesture from the US by not objecting on military cooperation between the two countries provided Israel an opportunity to sell weapons and defense technology to India. Indo-Israel cooperation is not limited to the purchases of military equipment alone but there are many commonalities in thoughts and desires that bring them closer. Israel's regional ambitions to create a Greater Israel or a promised land in the Middle East as Nur Masalha mentions the judgement of the late Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), the paramount spiritual leader of Gush Emunim,

"the destined borders of the Jewish state will stretch broadly across the whole area: Transjordan, the Golan Heights, the 'Bashan' (the Jabal Druze region in Syria), are all part of the 'Land of Israel'. Echoing the same vision of geopolitical ambitions, Yehuda Elitzur, one of the most influential scholars in Gush Emunim, considered the 'promised' or 'patriarchal' boundaries extending to the Euphrates River, southern Turkey, Transjordan and the Nile Delta; the lands which Israel is required eventually to conquer, 'redeem', 'inherit' and settle include northern Sinai, Lebanon and western Syria, the Golan Heights and much of Transjordan."<sup>16</sup>

India shares similar territorial ambitions with Israel: Indian Hindutva (Hindu-ness or Hindu nationalism) brigade's historical obsession with the idea of Akhand Bharat (Undivided India). Hindu nationalists adhere to the idea of a re-establishing of a united single state of India consisting of today's South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sir Lanka, Maldives and part of Afghanistan) as they believe India's

11 Ibid., 394.

12 "Elimination of racism and racial discrimination," United Nations, retrieved on February 26, 2019,<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r086.htm>.

13 Itzhak Gerberg, "The Changing Nature of Israeli-Indian Relations: 1948–2005" (PhD diss., University of South Africa).

14 Peter Berton. The Evolution of Sino-Israeli Relations. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 4:3(2010): 71.

15 Harsh V. Pant and Ambuj Sahu, "Israel's Arms Sales to India: Bedrock of a Strategic Partnership", *ORF Issue Brief No. 311*, September 2019, Observer Research Foundation. Accessed <https://www.orfonline.org/research/israels-arms-sales-to-india-bedrock-of-a-strategic-partnership-55101/>

16 Nur Masalha. "Jewish Fundamentalism, Greater Israel and the Palestinians." In *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*, 107 (London; Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000. Accessed July 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs7dk.7.

“natural borders ran from the Indus to the Eastern Sea, and from the Himalayas (including Kashmir, of course) to Kanyakumari”).<sup>17</sup> Another commonality in both countries is that they have good ties with the US and assume their Muslim neighbors are a threat to their existence. Israel’s animosity with neighboring Arab Muslim countries and India’s hostility with Muslim majority Pakistan and even hostile policies against its own Muslim population have the same patterns. A common friend and enemy have made them collaborate in all fields of economic, military and geostrategic interests in broader Asia. India has been supported by the US and Western allies in modernization and upgrading of the economic system, building strong defense capabilities and enhancing national capacity to defend its territorial interests in the region. Israel on the other hand is concentrating on building itself on the same line with the support of the US and its Western allies. The fast changing political and strategic global imperatives after the end of the Cold War have facilitated the alliance between the US, India and Israel for the short and long-term goals in the region. The cooperation has been materialized beyond an institutional framework and they are rapidly working on enhancing the comprehensive ties further.

## Theoretical Explanation of Growing Indo-US and Indo-Israel Strategic Ties

“There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interests. This is a bitter truth.”

Chanakya/Kautilya<sup>18</sup>

International relations and foreign policy theories are mostly based on the historical experiences and philosophy of the West. All the rules and principles of politics between states are set by the West and there is hardly any focus on non-Western scholarship or theorization of statecraft. The end of colonization and the rise of Asia demanded an emphasis on a non-Western tradition and theorization of IR.<sup>19</sup> India’s political philosophy and foreign policy making is an affair of centuries old experiences and teachings of indigenous philosophers and statesmen. It is imperative to have knowhow of ancient but well-structured and well blended local Indian wisdom behind the foreign policy making of modern India. India being an ancient civilization and a home to diverse cultures, habits and a historical evolution different from the rest, hardly could be explained by any one or multiple theories based on the experiences of non-Indian world. Though the needs and requirements of a globalized world are different, classical theories and philosophies are still helpful in analyzing the character of a specific state in the context of its historical evolution and interpreting the current policy making.<sup>20</sup> Chanakya also known as Kautilya (philosopher and policy maker of Gupta empire in 6th century BCE) is the main figure in Indian scholarship capable of explaining the policy making in the context of a pluralistic world order of the twenty first century. Understanding Chanakya’s guideline for statecraft and diplomacy could also make it easy to understand the modern India’s priorities in making friends and foes.

17 Stuart E. Corbridge. “Cartographies of Loathing and Desire: The Bharatiya Janata Party, the Bomb, and the Political Spaces of Hindu Nationalism,” in Yale H. Ferguson and R. J. Barry Jones (Ed.), *Political Space: Frontiers of Change and Governance in a Globalizing World* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2002), 157. Also, Radhakumud Mookerji, *Akhand Bharat* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1945), 5-7.

18 Quoted in Neelakanta Maharaj, *The Hindu Book of Success* (Bangalore: Geeta Books, 2008), 142.

19 Amitav Acharya, Barry Buzan Eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-25.

20 Mark Philp, “Political theory and history” In David Leopold & Marc. Stears (Eds.). *Political theory: Methods and approaches*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 128-149.

Keeping in mind Chanakya's guidelines on how to interact with a dominant power could be helpful in comprehension of the operating motivations behind the growing Indo-US and Indo-Israel strategic ties. Chanakya's theory of statehood and power acquisition and practice of power share the realists' notion of power. He advocates creating monopoly by gaining power in one's (king or an ambitious conqueror) sphere of influence and keeping a check on enemies and allies within that sphere of influence while maintaining the central authority. By this rule, every kingdom strives for power similar or more to its adversaries which results in a competition where the strongest survive and the weak perish. This competition keeps kingdoms in a state of 'perpetual preparedness' for the sake of survival and avoidance of punishment.<sup>21</sup> In Chanakya's sphere of interests or Mandala system (strategic compound of kingdoms), it is not imperative for the aspiring dominant state to have the maximum power in any given strategic competition, rather it needs tactics to manipulate the situation in its favor through a foreign policy apparatus and strategic maneuvers. The aspirant ruler or state can turn the conflict into cooperation and a prospective enemy into a friend or neutral by using diplomacy, enhancement of trade ties and interdependence to abolish the threat.<sup>22</sup> In his own words "Strength is of three kinds: power of deliberation is intellectual strength; the possession of a prosperous treasury and a strong army is the strength of sovereignty; and martial power is physical strength."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the difference in Western realism and Chanakya's realism is the concept of using economic interdependence as a tool to extract the benefits by neutralizing or befriending the enemy and Chanakya does not advocate predominance of military power over diplomatic tactics. Neither is he in favor of predominance of one state over others. Rather he favors hegemonic multilateralism. Applying this on the development of Indo-US strategic ties in the last decade of the twentieth century and beginning of twenty first century is helpful in understanding the Israel factor in growing Indo-US strategic ties. India, despite having regional and global ambitions, was able to win the support (financial and military) of the hegemon of the time using clever diplomatic maneuvers and by developing strong geostrategic relations with the state of Israel in a very smart foreign policy strategy.

Another theoretical explanation of growing strategic interactions between the US, India and Israel could be the strategy of band wagoning (Sweeney and Fritz explain band wagoning as joining the strong one to counter the threat<sup>24</sup>). India in Asia is unable to counter or balance the US power or the rising China, so as a medium size power it opted to align with the US and its allies. Here common regional interests dominate the fear factor. The support of US could help overcome the regional threats.<sup>25</sup>

Many times, states with considerable power and ambitions prefer to join other powers' alliances to extract benefits by influencing the alliance partners. Alliances, formal or informal, are the major source of strengthening power and are helpful "tools of great power management."<sup>26</sup>

Strategic partnership between two states is a foreign policy tool to serve the common interests and there should be some common values on which the partnership could base itself. It happens when the bilateral relations among states reach to a level where they do not hesitate to show flexibility on differences and cooperate on the issues of mutual interests. The consensual long-term partnership on strategic common

21 Benoy Kumar Sarkar, "Hindu Theory of International Relations," *The American Political Science Review* 13:03 (1919): 400-14.

22 Chanakya, *Arthashastra*. Translated into English by R. Shamastry (2010). (United States: Bottom of the Hill Publishing): 491, 550.

23 Ibid., 368.

24 Please see, Kevin Sweeney and Paul Fritz, "Jumping on the Bandwagon: An Interest-Based Explanation for Great Power Alliances." *Journal of Politics* 66:2 (2004): 428-449.

25 Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 187-189.

26 Paul W. Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815-1945: Weapons of Power and tools of Management," (1976) In Klaus Knorr, (Eds.). *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1976), 230-31.

goals is more than what bilateral diplomatic understandings and strategic partnership could define for the partner states' preferences towards other states in the system.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Wilkins (2012) defines strategic partnership among states as a well-structured arrangement based on not very strict conditions; the purpose is to overcome the shared insecurities or common challenges and seizing opportunities not only in one area but different fields of mutual interests.<sup>28</sup> The impression of difference in alliance and alignment is obvious in his conception of strategic partnership as it does not involve any strict binding on partner states. Strategic partnership is easy to form and maintain for several reasons unlike alliances; first, it does not necessarily enforce any condition that makes any of the partners to compromise on their sovereignty and autonomy and, second, it is an institutionalized framework that allows the partners to claim equal economic or security benefits out of the partnership.<sup>29</sup> In Vidya Nadkarni's (2010) words, strategic partnership is "the structure of sustained and regularized interactions underpinned by multiple webs of institutionalization at the inter-governmental level that they encompass."<sup>30</sup> In the post-Cold War period mostly developing economies with potential to play a significant role in regional or world politics get into strategic partnership with the major powers with whom they share some kind of common interests and shared goals. Generally, the purpose of strategic partnership could be mutual growth or security without any specific counter balancing of any third country. However, during the Cold War such strategic partnerships were solely based on balancing or counterbalancing any potential threat. The example of such strategic partnership cum alliance is India's defense and economic ties with the USSR against China and Pakistan. Sometimes states do not announce formal alliances, but they do operate as an alliance under the guise of strategic partnerships. China-Pakistan ties during and after the Cold War could be taken as an example of balancing the threat of India and USSR during the Cold war and the USA, India and Israel in the post-Cold War period. India's close relations with the Soviet Union against the Chinese threat during the Cold War period is another example of a threat balancing strategy. The Soviet Union provided India with extensive strategic support (military technology and weapons) against their common enemy China.<sup>31</sup> In the post-Cold War period, India aligned with the US and its allies to counter balance the threat of rising China in the region and most recently when the Chinese army killed dozens of Indian soldiers in a standoff at the Ladakh border, American officials hinted that the US is "not going to stand by and let China or anyone else take the reins in terms of being the most powerful, dominant force, whether it's in that region or over here," which indicated US strategic partnership with India against China.<sup>32</sup> In this scenario, Kenneth Waltz's described purpose of alliance making could be applicable on strategic partnership, since both serve the goal of balancing the growing influence or power of an adversary and ensure security from any kind of threat.<sup>33</sup>

In this theoretical background, post-Cold War India-US-Israel growing ties in defense and geostrategic spheres could be discussed in two perspectives: 1. Mutual growth and partnership in the fields of economy and defense 2. This collaboration is aimed at soft balancing or counterbalancing the rising threats in broader Asia.

27 Lucyna Czechowska, "The concept of strategic partnership as an input in the modern alliance theory." *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies* No. 2:4 (2013): 42.

28 Thomas S. Wilkins, Alignment, Not Alliance: The Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation," *Review of International Studies* 38(1) (2012): 67.

29 John Ciorciari, *The Limits of Alignment: Southeast Asia and the Great Powers since 1975* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 9.

30 Vidya Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing Without Alliances* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 48-49.

31 Sumit Ganguly. To Fight China, India Needs to Forget Russia, *Foreign Policy* July 16, 2020, Accessed <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/16/india-fighting-china-means-forgetting-russia/>

32 U.S. military to stand with India in conflict with China, indicates WH official, The Hindu, July 7, 2020, Accessed <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-military-to-stand-with-india-in-conflict-with-china-indicates-wh-official/article32010141.ece>

33 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Addison-Wesley Pub.Co, 1979), 128.

## Indo-Israel Defense Cooperation

Indo-Israel security cooperation is the jest of their good diplomatic and geostrategic ties. Israel has successfully covered the void of the former Soviet Union in fulfilling India's need for sophisticated weapons. Kumaraswamy (1998) writes on the security dimension of forming Indo-Israel ties in January 1992,

"The decision by India's Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, in January 1992, to establish full and normal diplomatic relations with Israel was partly influenced by an appreciation of the potential security cooperation between the two countries. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the multiplicity of suppliers meant that India had to negotiate with numerous countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The fragmentation of the supply system made India extremely vulnerable."<sup>34</sup>

India was in a post-Soviet world looking for reliable sources to upgrade its weapons and defense equipment and this need pushed India to develop close military and strategic ties with Israel. In his memoirs, J.N Dixit, former foreign secretary of India, observes that India's dire need of a strong defense and modernization of its weapons are accountable for the change of the Indian foreign policy towards Israel: "Israel had developed expertise in improving the weapons systems of Soviet origin which could be utilized by India."<sup>35</sup>

During the first Gulf War, IAF (Indian Air Force) officials keenly observed the destruction of Iraqi hardened aircraft shelters by U.S. strike aircraft using 2,000-pound smart bombs and following the Gulf War, India and US signed a pact on military cooperation in 1995. India also started receiving technical support to its Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) program from the US and IAF received 315 Texas Instruments Paveway bomb-guidance kits.<sup>36</sup> Despite these efforts, Indo-American relations continued to flounder.<sup>37</sup> Pakistan had good ties with the US and they were allies during the Cold War, so it had access to more sophisticated and quality arms. This made India to realize the capacity of their 'Made-in-India' weapons and the need to upgrade them with the help of Israel and other Western allies.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the Indian armed forces enthusiastically approved Indo-Israel defense cooperation. Israel on the other hand was also willing to help India in acquiring advanced military technology which India was not able to get from the Western producers because of arms sales restrictions imposed on it.<sup>39</sup>

The Kargil war between India and Pakistan in 1999 encouraged India to buy Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and other surveillance equipment to keep a check on its western border with Pakistan.<sup>40</sup> Israel has achieved distinctive recognition in producing military surveillance systems like cross border sensors and the Airborne Early Warning (A.E.W) system and India is importing all three from Israel.<sup>41</sup> In missile defense technology, Israel exported Barak-I AMD systems to India in 2001.<sup>42</sup> India came under US sanctions (under

34 Polur Raman Kumaraswamy, *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership Volume 1* (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 1998), 10.

35 Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary*. (New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Ltd, 1996), 10.

36 Eric Arnett. Nuclear Stability and Arms Sales to India: Implications for U.S. Policy, *Arms Control Association*, Accessed <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-08/features/nuclear-stability-arms-sales-india-implications-us-policy>

37 Jerome M. Conley. Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation: Implications for U.S. Security Interests, INSS Occasional Paper 31, *Proliferation Series*, February 2000, USAF Institute for National Security Studies USAF Academy, Colorado, Accessed <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/india/doctrine/ocp31.htm>

38 Raju Thomas, "The security and economy of a reforming India, in Asia's international role in the post-Cold War era," *Adelphi* paper no. 276 (1993):62-82.

39 Vernon Hewitt, *The new international politics of South Asia*. (Manchester University Press: Manchester, UK, 1997), 25-28.

40 Rahul Bedi, "Moving closer to Israel," *Frontline*, February 28, 2003. Accessed March 5, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/f2004/stories/20030228002005500.htm>

41 Ibid.

42 Nicolas Blarel, "India-Israel at 25: Defense Ties," *Middle East Institute*, April 4, 2017, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/india-israel-25-defense-ties>.

the Glenn Amendment the United States immediately placed India and Pakistan under economic sanctions) after testing its nuclear capabilities in May 1998 and at that time Israel became the means to provide India an access to US defense technology and sold India the Green Pine Radar, the sub-elements of the Arrow system.<sup>43</sup> Israel's good knowhow of Soviet war equipment was also beneficial for India in upgrading its air force, navy and ground forces' combat weapons.<sup>44</sup> India signed another deal for 1.1 billion USD to purchase three Phalcon AEW systems from Israel.<sup>45</sup> Other than providing weapon and defense technology to India, Israeli forces have conducted war exercises (Blue Flag Drill) with their Indian counterparts in 2017. The Indian army receives training from their Israeli counterpart on how to use exported military equipment in Indian held Jammu and Kashmir and how to curb freedom of movement and urban warfare in different parts of India.<sup>46</sup> India's Cabinet Committee on Security showed its interest in requesting Israeli training for four new Special Forces counter-insurgency battalions for Kashmir.<sup>47</sup> India's Border Security Forces (BSF) has also proposed taking benefit of Israel's experience in training its personnel in Israel, as Israel has "a long history of guarding its borders along the Palestinian territories effectively."<sup>48</sup>

The increasing India-Israel military and defense exchanges and collaboration in the last three decades exhibit both countries' close strategic relations and the will to strengthen it further. Indian policy makers have utilized the post-Cold War political scenario to build close defense ties with Israel and their close proximity to the US facilitate their military deals and strategic cooperation further.

## India-Israel Political Cooperation

India-Israel political ties are mainly associated with their defense and geostrategic needs, although they have been cooperating with each other in the field of agriculture, technology, surveillance and medicine as well. In the post 9/11 period, both countries expressed their complete political support to the US and War on Terror. India's National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra during his visit to the US in 2003 addressed the American Jewish Committee (the Jewish lobby that played a major role in making India recognize the state of Israel and bring India and the US closer). In his address he said,

"India, the United States, and Israel have some fundamental similarities. We are all democracies, sharing a common vision of pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity.... The US, India and Israel have all been prime targets of terrorism. They have to jointly face the same ugly face of modern-day terrorism.... As the main targets of international terrorism, democratic countries should form a viable alliance against terrorism."<sup>49</sup>

India's desire to use its close ties with the pro-Israel Jewish lobbies in the American Congress to extract political gains is explicitly visible in Brajesh Mishra's address, "I am pleased to see so many distinguished

43 A. Vinod Kumar, "A Phased Approach to India's Missile Defence Planning." *Strategic Analysis* 32(2) (2008), 180-187.

44 S. Samuel, C. Rajiv, "India, Israel and the Defence Taboo," *Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis*, September 30, 2010, accessed March 06, 2019, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaIsraelandtheDefenceTaboo\\_ssrajiv\\_300910](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaIsraelandtheDefenceTaboo_ssrajiv_300910)

45 Ron Ben-Yishai, "Arms deal underway, first Israeli Phalcon lands in India," *Ynet news*, May 25, 2009, accessed <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3721499,00.html>

46 India, Israel army brass hold talks, *Times of India*, Jun 2 14, 2007, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Israel-army-brass-hold-talks/articleshow/2121327.cms>

47 Stephan Blank, "Arms Sales and Technology Transfer in Indo-Israel Relations," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 19(1) (2005): 28.

48 Quoted in Efraim Inbar, Alvite Singh Ningthoujam, *Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century* (Israel: Bar Ilan University, 2012), 12.

49 Address by Shri Brajesh Mishra, National Security Advisor at the American Jewish Committee Annual Dinner. *Ministry of External Affairs India*, May 08, 2003, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4526/Address+by+Shri+Brajesh+Mishra+National+Security+Advisor+at+the+American+Jewish+Committee+Annual+Dinner>

members of the United States Congress here today”, Brajesh Mishra told the AJC. “They are friends of Israel. They are also friends of India.... The increasing contact between the AJC and the Indian-American community organizations is another positive reflection of shared values of our peoples.”<sup>50</sup>

India was always reluctant to support Israel vis-à-vis its conflict with the Arab world, but the post-1992 scenario changed in favor of Israel in multilateral diplomatic platforms. In 2001, India along with the US and other European countries, favored Israel for the first time in a multilateral platform when it blocked diplomatic efforts by Arab states to include Israel’s anti-Arab policies in the final resolution of the Durban conference on racism in September 2001.<sup>51</sup> India was a vocal supporter of the cause of Palestine but after establishing formal diplomatic ties with Israel and strengthening of the defense and geostrategic relations, the Indian stance on Palestine lost its past enthusiasm. During Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s visit to India in September 2003, India deliberately ignored to mention the Palestine issue throughout his visit and in the Delhi Statement at the end of Sharon’s visit.<sup>52</sup> On multilateral political platforms India hesitates to condemn Israel’s atrocities in Gaza or West Bank. On the other hand, Jewish influential lobbies in the US Congress proved to be highly beneficial for India’s policy on Jammu and Kashmir and rivalries with Pakistan. The strongest Jewish lobby in the US, the Jewish Institute of National Security Affairs (JINSA) and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) advocate Indian interests in US Congress along with US based Indian lobbies.<sup>53</sup>

## The Strategic Roots of Cooperation

The growing strategic competition from China in Asia is the major reason of confluence between the US, Israel and India. The rivalry to keep strategic interests intact in the maritime domain increases the possibility of cooperation and collaboration in all fields especially in defense and geostrategic politics. The security of energy supply and naval movement lines in the Arabian Gulf, East Mediterranean and Indian Ocean is a major cause of concern for the US. The rising Chinese influence in the region is a threat to the US monopoly in this very region. Israel shares the US concerns as its own interests rest in the stability and dominance in the region. Iran is a common enemy for both and Tehran’s strong influence on its neighboring Arab countries is being considered as a direct threat to the stability and wellbeing of Israel. Iran’s support to non-state actors in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq irritates Israel and the US. The assassination of Iranian commander Qassim Suleimani in a US strike on Baghdad airport has demonstrated the US and its allies’ dislike of Iran’s interference in these countries. Iran’s strategic position in the Indian Ocean favors China and endangers American strategic designs for the future in handling any kind of threat from China. Iran’s capabilities to close the Strait of Hormuz for communication or energy supplies in case of conflict could seriously harm US interests and recently Iran threatened to block Hormuz when it came under economic sanctions from the US.<sup>54</sup> Hence, the US and Israel are keen to keep the Indian Ocean under the control of a friendly country and India is the most suitable candidate to do the job since the US does not have trust based

50 Address by Shri Brajesh Mishra.

51 Dalia Shehori, Yair Sheleg, “Israel, U.S. Leave Durban; Peres Dubs Meet a Farce,” *Haaretz*, September 04, 2001, Accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5427327>

52 For Delhi Statement please see, Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation between India and Israel. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 10, 2003, accessed <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/bilateral/pages/delhi%20statement%20on%20friendship%20and%20cooperation%20btw.aspx>

53 Vijay Prashad, *Namaste Sharon: Hindutava and Sharonism Under U.S. Hegemony* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2003), 4-5, 7.

54 Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Iran threatens to block Strait of Hormuz over US oil sanctions.” *The Guardian*, July 5, 2018, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/05/iran-retaliate-us-oil-threats-eu-visit-hassan-rouhani-trump>.

ties with Pakistan as it had during the Cold War period because of security issues and Pakistan's strategic ties with China. Indo-Israel strategic partnership in the Indian Ocean enables Israel to have an edge on Iran not only from land but sea as well.

The formation of the US, India and Israel could be understood in terms of protecting and promoting geostrategic interests in the region. The maritime threats and vulnerabilities motivate all three countries to work closely for a more comprehensive way to overcome the weaknesses. It would be appropriate to call it an alliance of mutual interests vis-à-vis common threats and mutual ambitions. An interesting fact is that India's ties with Iran are very cordial and both the countries are working to take their bilateral ties forward. India depends on Iranian energy resources heavily and Iran provides India an alternative trade passage to Central Asia via Chabahar port (the project agreement was signed in 2003 between India, Afghanistan and Iran, under the North-South Transport Corridor framework, to be used by all three of them as a trade hub. India committed 500 million USD initially and 2 billion USD in total for infrastructure building. The first phase of the Chabahar port was operationalized in December 2017) bypassing Pakistani land and maritime routes.<sup>55</sup> Israel and the US give concessions to India on Iran by not condemning India's investment in the Chabahar project and energy deals. India is allowed to do investment in energy projects in Iran as it benefits all three countries and energy and trade corridors are actually facilitating the trade and energy supplies to Europe as well.<sup>56</sup> The US, India and Israel thus make an alliance that overlook differences and confluence on the common interests and mutual benefits.

Intelligence sharing is another feature of strong strategic cooperation among the trio. Post 9/11 India, Israel and the US have been coordinating on intelligence sharing and Israel is a great support to India's space satellite program (the agreement for cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Israel Space Agency (ISA) was signed during PM Modi's visit to Israel in 2017<sup>57</sup>) that ensures access to strategically important installations as well as the important happenings taking place in the region.<sup>58</sup>

The US assurance to facilitate India in becoming a global power<sup>59</sup> and allowing Israel sharing modern warfare technology and combat training with India can be seen in the context of formation of a loose alliance of three countries. Though any such alliance has not been announced officially, voices from credible non-official circles often call for a formal strategic alliance.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The Indo-Israel strategic partnership and strong diplomatic relations could be rightly attributed to the growing Indo-US bilateral ties. India's post-Cold War policy shift via-a-vis Israel should be seen in the context of its changing foreign policy with the US. From finding new reliable strategic partners to sharing the new world (post-Cold War) ideology (capitalism), India, the US and Israel's shared interests bring them

<sup>55</sup> "Why Chabahar port is a win-win for India," *Hindustan Times*, December 26, 2018, accessed March 7 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/editorials/why-chabahar-port-is-a-win-win-for-india/story-2ZfjqHs4Q05cZPIPsKnR9I.html>.

<sup>56</sup> "Why Chabahar port is a win-win for India."

<sup>57</sup> India-Israel to deepen cooperation in space technologies, *The Economic Times*, July 2, 2017. Accessed <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/india-israel-to-deepen-cooperation-in-space-technologies/articleshow/59427068.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>58</sup> Efraim Inbar and Alvite Singh Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 93, (2012), 14.

<sup>59</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, US security policy pitches for India's global power status. *The Economic Times*, July 12, 2018 accessed <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-security-policy-pitches-for-indias-global-power-status/articleshow/62140461.cms>

<sup>60</sup> Ranjit Gupta, "Oral History: India and Israel," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 5, no. 1 (2018), 68–73.

closer. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India was in a dire need to find a new support system while the US was searching for a reliable partner in Asia. Chanakya's philosophy explains modern India's approach to establishing multilateralism using diplomatic tactics and by growing domestic military and economic power. Chanakya's principle of statecraft emphasizes creating an atmosphere where an average power can win its due status in the system by friendship and interdependence. Developing close ties with Israel has won India America's support. The Jewish lobby in the US Congress helped to promote the Indian agenda and to bring the two countries closer. The growing Indo-US strategic ties in return contributed to strengthening the strategic partnership between India and Israel by supporting their bilateral defense and geostrategic agreements. The security of the sea lines of communication in the wake of the rise of China and threats from Iran is equally significant for all three countries and demands close collaboration to assure the transmission and transport of crucial energy resources. In the context of rising Chinese influence in the region, India finds it more convenient to bandwagon with the US to counter the threat. India needs advanced military technology and Israel is the major exporter of weapons and defense systems to the country. The leadership of both countries exchange visits regularly and have a common stance on many issues of regional and global importance. Israel's proximity to the US has been the source of bringing Indo-US policy makers on the same page on matters of geopolitical importance despite having some differences on promoting economic interests. Israeli and Indian leadership is determined to support each other in security and other geostrategic matters in the region and beyond. They both have affirmation from the US to collaborate in security matters and regional politics. India's friendly trade ties with the Muslim Gulf states are not a hurdle in developing close working relations with Israel and neither is its diplomatic support for Palestine spoiling or derailing their strong defense and geostrategic relations. The excelling loose formation of India-Israel-US is based on mutual benefits and mutual interests, and, in the perusal of common interests, their differences do not create any kind of problem (so far).

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