Historical Evolution of India-Israel Relationship

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ABSTRACT

The two oldest civilisations are India and Israel. India prefers a multipolar world while Israel prefers a unipolar world. It was only in 1950 that India finally accepted Israel as a sovereign nation since then, both states have had diplomatic relations which are expanding in terms of economics, defense and strategy. Thus, diplomatic relations between India started in 1992 under capitalism as their main driver. Since that time, they have collaborated to launch missiles and have ties in agriculture, water management, trade cyber security and space among others. Presently, Israel's number one export market is India when it comes to defense supplies. Both nations also share almost similar ideologies and cultures. There exist large Jewish populations within different Indian states like Maharashtra. India has entered into an alliance with Israel for intelligence sharing on fighting terrorism together with other national threats posed to them by terrorists. These advances have made both countries influential across the globe with Israeli technological assistance benefiting most sectors especially military of India greatly.

Keywords: Cybersecurity, water harvesting, renewable energy, counter-terrorism.

Introduction

The evolution of India-Israel ties over time is a powerful story of how the two countries went from cautious diplomacy to a strong and active alliance. Since Israel's founding in 1948 and India's independence in 1947, the relationship between the two countries has undergone significant changes. Support for the Palestinian cause and membership in the Non-Aligned Movement shaped India's long-standing distance from Israel. Despite underlying cultural and historical linkages, such as the existence of ancient Jewish communities in India, little diplomatic involvement marked this era. The geopolitical changes that occurred after the Cold War ended provide a crucial opportunity for reassessment. India and Israel formally established diplomatic relations in 1992, which opened the door to more cooperation. Defence, technology, agriculture, and trade are just a few areas where their mutual links have flourished since then. From a state of tentative partnership to a more solid alliance, the two groups shared democratic values and objectives in the areas of security, innovation, and economic development, which have driven their collaboration forward. Israel and India's modern relationship exemplifies the power of diplomacy and the potential for states with diverse histories to forge progressive alliances.

The Ancient India-Israel Jewish Connection

India has no historical track record of anti-Semitism from the time Jews arrived up to the time they left for Israel. Nevertheless, some scholars debate the validity of such a claim. Nevertheless, collective memory of Indian Jews includes significant figures such as the Maharaja of Jamnagar who exhibited generosity and admiration for Jews. In India, however, Jewish people were not merely tolerated but rather embraced, respected and incorporated with recognition of their ability to maintain their own identity cultural uniqueness and spiritual differences. One Jewish clan settled on Malabar Coast by 70 AD after Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the second

temple which is considered as earliest Jewish settlement in India. The Baghdadi Jewish community moved from Iraq and Aleppo into Surat and Mumbai on Western Coast also Kolkata in East India. These are Jewish descendants; Bnei Menashe live primarily in Manipur and Mizoram states located in northeastern parts of India.

Creation of Israel and India's Response

The British requested that the United Nations handle the issue because they felt powerless to do so after World War II. As a result, in November 1947, the UN voted to divide Palestine and form an independent Jewish state. In 1948, the United Nations established Israel as a Jewish state in the Middle East. Prior to its founding, Jews were refugees in Palestine, and with the assistance of Britain and the United States of America, they later established the State of Israel. In May 1948, David Ben Gurion declared the independence of the new state of Israel[1]. The new state was immediately attacked by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon[2]. Since their creation, Israel and the Arab States have been at war in both direct and indirect ways. The Middle East became a theatre of conflict between Israel and other states in the region with the establishment of the State of Israel. Israel's bid for U.N. membership was accepted in May 1949. Israel was admitted to the United Nations practically immediately after its establishment..

India strongly objected to the partition of Palestine, but eventually, in September 1950, it acknowledged the establishment of Israel. Nevertheless, despite Israel's acknowledgement, India refrained from establishing diplomatic envoys between the two nations. However, Israel was eventually granted permission to establish a consulate in Bombay, which is now known as Mumbai. India has strong historical, political, and economic connections with Arab nations. Arab support for India in its fight against imperialism and colonialism influenced India's foreign policy in favour of the Arab nations. The impact of the Arab world on India increased over time, resulting in India adopting a stronger pro-Arab and anti-Zionist stance.

Suez Crisis, 1956

A conference was convened in London, where Nehru assured Nasser that the purpose of India's attendance at the conference was not to weaken Egypt's position but to prevent any unilateral actions from being taken at the conference. In the conference, India ardently prevented the western move to aggrandize their interests and Egypt's nationalisation of the Canal[3]. In spite of a number of diplomatic efforts to solve the problems, Israel, in collaboration with Britain and France, launched a sudden and premeditated attack on Egypt on September 29, 1956[4], India did not expect such a sudden attack and expressed her hope that the United Nations would be able to take steps to prevent the extension of hostilities. Nehru publicly condemned Israeli actions and branded them as a case of clear, naked aggression[5].

June War, 1967

India also showed strong reactions against Israel in the June 1967 war; the Indian government blamed Israel for escalating the situation into an armed conflict. Referring to the Indian soldiers in the U.N. emergency force that Israeli forces killed. Indira Gandhi condemned the killing as deliberate and unprovoked. The Indian government, as always, took a very pro-Arab stand and even went to the extent of sponsoring the UAR draft[6]. The war also crystallised India's West Asian policy into supporting the Palestinian cause. She identified herself closer with the Palestinians and openly supported them in their struggle against the Israeli government[7]. India, being a non-aligned country, was reluctant to accept the hostile policy of Israel and condemned American policy towards the Arabs. Due to Israeli aggression in 1967 against the Arabs, India decided to break off relations with Israel even at the consulate level as an immediate measure, and she extended moral support to the deprived Arabs who were the victims of Israeli aggression.[8]

Indo-China War, 1962

When China attacked India, the country requested military aid from all across the world. Israel's response was favourable. The U.S. support for India also helped in that context. So, after the 1962 Chinese aggression, a powerful lobby was active in India, which canvassed, for various reasons, in favour of the immediate establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. It is also argued that India should adopt a pro-American policy that would bring India and Israel together, and

that was imprudent on the part of India to thrust all weight behind the Arabs because she got only lukewarm attitudes from the Arabs in 1962 and 1965[9].

Indira Gandhi Era and After

Indira Gandhi, while addressing the General Assembly on October 14, 1967, also stressed the need for solving the problem by political means based on the principles of security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all the states in the areas[10]. During the Arab Israeli conflicts through 1967–69, India took sides with the Arabs and denounced, Israel for attacks on Beirut international airport in December 1969. India was also unhappy with Israel over its occupation of Al-Aqsa mosque in eastern Jerusalem. At the U.N., India urged the immediate implementation of the Security Council resolution on Jerusalem.[11]

Opposition parties Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party, Praja Socialist, and Samyukta Socialist Party criticised India's lack of concern for Israel. Proposals have suggested that if several nations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Yugoslavia, Kenya, and others, can sustain positive ties with both Arabs and Israel, why can't India follow suit? They advised the Indian authorities not to succumb to Arab pressure for appeasement. Additionally, they said that a significant portion of the Arab population expressed their support for Pakistan, while the United Arab Republic maintained a mostly impartial stance. Given the UAE's ability to establish cordial relationships with Pakistan, India, and China, it is reasonable to question why India cannot maintain amiable ties with both the UAE and Israel.

Janata Party Era

The Janata Party stressed clearly that, in the international field, it would pursue a genuinely non-aligned policy. It should not only remain non-aligned but also appear to be so. The party would follow a policy that would not show that India was tilting towards a particular bloc[12]. So, the non-alignment policy continued to form the cornerstone of India's foreign policy. In light of this, India was forced to stick to its old policy, which had been in place since independence and had not changed. During the Janta regime, the foundation of India's foreign policy was investigated, and non-alignment was seen as one of the fundamental principles of foreign policy. Developing relations with Israel would appear to many Indians and Arabs as a departure from non-alignment policy for the simple reason that Israel is a close ally of the United States. During the Janata regime, Indo-Israeli relations were put on hold. Moshe Dayan, Israel's then-foreign minister, visited India; however, the trip did not provide the desired outcomes.[13]

When Moshe Dayan arrived in India, there were no official relations between India and Israel, despite the fact that an Israeli consulate had been opened in Bombay. The major purpose of the mission was to establish diplomatic relations with India. Dayan met and spoke with the then-Indian Prime Minister during his tour. Desai, the Indian Prime Minister, expressed his opinion to Dayan[14].

"You must make peace with the Arabs. The Israelis have suffered from the Nazi's and the persecution in Europe, but the Palestinians should not be made to pay for that. The refugees should be settled, and you have to withdraw from the occupied territories, which would be proclaimed a Palestinian state".

Normalisation and After

Despite the Indian government's initial effort to delay the decision about diplomatic ties with Israel, Israel's uncompromising stance and certain adjustments ultimately compelled India to make a definitive choice. Three key factors determined the timing of India's shift in foreign policy towards Israel, which was the central focus of the transition. Three factors that drove the change were as follows:

1. China and Israel officially established diplomatic relations on January 24, 1992.

2. The third round of Middle East peace negotiations began in Moscow on January 28 and 29, 1992.

3. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's official visit to the United States to participate in the UN Security Council meeting in New York in early February 1991.

P. R. Kumaraswamy, Professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, and a specialist on Indo-Israel relations, stated: "Since 1947, Washington has been nudging India to modify its policy towards Israel. It was not accidental that normalisation was announced on the eve of Rao's visit to New York.[15]

India, as a developing force, has a desire to engage in commerce with the entire Middle East region. Consequently, it is imperative that it maintain positive relationships with all of the region's states, including Israel and the Arab World. Former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao made the decision to establish diplomatic ties in response to the constantly changing circumstances and demands. In January 1992, both India and Israel formally established diplomatic relations. The normalisation of relations liberated both nations to seek fresh prospects. Since that time, the two parties have engaged in considerable collaboration in several domains, such as agriculture, water management strategies, the use of solar energy, science and technology, and the military industry

Atal Bihari Vajpayee Era

When Vajpayee assumed office, he did not have an inkling that he would cement strong relations with Israel. Since the establishment of diplomatic missions in 1992 and the official visit of the Israeli President to India in 1996, bilateral ties have been moving forward steadily. Detractors saw this as an ideological convergence during Vajpayee's Prime Ministership. The criticism came mostly from those with a leftist political leaning who equated BJP's right-wing slant on peace, security and nationhood with what appeared to be Israel's concentration on building a racially pure state. However, actual evidence shows that despite its theoretical appeal and analytical relevance, his administration did not prioritize Israel as their most important strategic partner. Right after his appointment as prime minister, Vajpayee conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran disregarding United States instructions.

The collaboration with Israel in trade and agriculture progressed well. Yitzhak Shelev, the Deputy Director General of Israel's Foreign Office, visited India for the fourth round of Foreign Office Consultations in New Delhi on January 21, 1999.[16] The Second Meeting of the Indo-Israeli Joint Trade & Economic Committee took place in New Delhi on October 27, 1998. Israel's Minister of Regional Cooperation, Shimon Peres. Home Minister L. K. Advani met with President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Both parties agreed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) on counter-terrorism during the Home

Minister's visit. The Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh, visited Israel in July 2000.[17]

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made the first official visit to India by an Israeli Prime Minister from 8-10 September 2003. Yosef Lapid, the deputy prime minister and minister of justice, Limor Livni, Yisrael Katz, the minister of agriculture and rural development, and a sizable number of Israeli businessmen were present with him. Mr. Sharon met with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and discussed various topics with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister & Home Minister L.K. Advani, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha, Finance Minister Jaswant Singh, Defence Minister George Fernandes and Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi.

Manmohan Singh Era

In Manmohan Singh's period as the Prime Minister, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government adroitly handled Israel by balancing national interests with political rhetoric. During the time of Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government managed the relationship with Israel with great expertise through striking a balance between national interests & political rhetoric. Terrorism threat to both countries and growing defense partnership were main factors that influenced India and Israel's bilateral relations at this stage. Indo-Israeli friendship became diversified under the tenure of Manmohan Singh. Such common predicament has led to a better understanding of each other's issues particularly in post 9/11 era. India's military relations with Israel is bilateral not regional or global in nature. The military partnership between India and Israel has progressed steadily and positively. India openly identified five defence partners; France, Russia, USA, UK and Israel as friendly countries and defense partners.

Economic engagement between India and Israel flourished during Manmohan Singh government. Bilateral trade increased, and both countries explored avenues for investment and collaboration in sectors such as agriculture, technology, and innovation. Economic cooperation contributed to mutual prosperity and strengthened the foundations of the bilateral relationship.

Narendra Modi Era

Narendra Modi became the first Prime Minister from India to visit Israel in the last 70 years. His itinerary did not include Palestine. It shows India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine, which means India will have its bilateral strategic ties with Israel irrespective of its political stance on the Israel-Palestine issue. India is the largest buyer of Israeli military equipment, and Israel is the second largest defence supplier after Russia. The export-oriented Israeli defence industry and its openness to establishing joint ventures complement both Make in India and Make with India in defence. Israel is supplying Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, missile defence systems, surveillance radar, etc. to India. India and Israel are boosting counter-terrorism cooperation and sharing real-time intelligence on issues crucial to national security. In 2021, India and Israel signed a three-year work programme agreement for development in agriculture cooperation. India-Israel villages of excellence is a new concept aimed at creating a model ecosystem in agriculture.

There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian origin in Israel, who are all Israeli passport holders. There are about 10,000 Indian citizens in Israel, of whom around 9,000 are carers. Others are diamond traders, some information technology (IT) professionals, students, and unskilled workers. India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions, and in popular Israeli perception, India is an attractive, alternative tourist destination. Israeli youth are mainly attracted to India.

Conclusion:

There are significant historical, geographical, and cultural contrasts between India and Israel; nonetheless, the relationship between the two countries is a paradigm of successful and developing cooperation. Mutual respect, shared values, and a commitment to addressing common issues through strategic cooperation and innovation form the foundations of this partnership. The alliance between India and Israel will surely play a vital role in defining a safe, successful, and sustainable future for both their respective populations as well as the larger international community as both countries continue to develop their connections with one another more and more. ❖ ❖ ❖

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