

# SURVEY OF ARAB AFFAIRS

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## PROSPECTS FOR ISRAELI-INDIAN SECURITY RELATIONS

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**A History of Limited Military Cooperation / Upgrading Soviet-Supplied Inventories / Upgrading Indian Defense Industries / Preventing Infiltration / Research and Development / Counter-Terrorism / Self-Sufficiency / Battlefield Experience / The New International Environment / Recession in Israel's Defense Industry / Some Limitations to Cooperation / Overcoming Historic Mutual Indifference / Indian Domestic Political Pressures / Alternative Options for India / Exploring a Range of Prospects**

[Editor's Note: The question of Israeli-Indian military cooperation impacts on Israeli-Arab relations in a number of ways. Headlines in recent days speak of Pakistani development of the first Islamic atomic bomb. It was announced that the Pakistani prime minister might possibly be the first to make an official state visit to the Palestinian Autonomy to meet with Yassir Arafat, despite Pakistan's lack of diplomatic relations with Israel. Finally, a number of triangular relationships involving the United States and the Middle East also come into play in matters concerning India and Israel. Therefore, we see the question of Israeli-Indian security relations as having definite repercussions on Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors, and offer this analysis by an Indian researcher at Hebrew University who specializes in those relations.]

### **A History of Limited Military Cooperation**

India's decision in January 1992 to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel completed a long

process that began on September 18, 1950, when New Delhi recognized the Jewish state. Even though Israel had opened a consulate in Bombay in the early 1950s, its functions and jurisdiction had been extremely limited and restricted.

This prolonged absence of full ties, however, did not prevent both parties from developing limited military understanding and cooperation, facilitated by two unique factors. First, India was one of the few countries in the world where persecution of Jews or anti-Semitism was alien and non-existent. India had even provided shelter to a number of Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany.

Secondly, since the early 1920s Indian leaders have been sympathetic toward the Palestinians in the Arab-Israeli conflict and India earned the distinction of being the only non-Muslim country to have voted against the partition resolution in 1947. Yet India did not strengthen the Arab military forces confronting Israel; its support

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for the Arabs has been moral and political but not military. In other words, New Delhi has never posed or even contributed to the Arab threat against the security and well-being of the Jewish state.

At the same time, during periods of India's national crises, Israel emerged as a source of military assistance. According to various Indian and Israeli sources, India sought and obtained certain quantities of small arms and ammunition from the Jewish state during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971. Even after all these years, the details are rarely acknowledged officially.

This mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's basic security needs continued throughout the decades when there were no formal ties. The establishment of full diplomatic relations thus presents a new era of openness and offers more avenues of cooperation. In their public postures, both states are emphasizing the economic dimension of bilateral relations and cooperation. The possibility of security-related cooperation, however, is high on the agenda.

Political and economic conditions in Israel and India are conducive to a serious and mutually beneficial security relationship. Undertaken with prudence, care and patience, it should not be difficult to lay the foundation for strong political relations and mutual understanding between the two countries. A number of broad areas of security cooperation between Israel and India have been identified.

#### **Upgrading Soviet-Supplied Inventories**

Due to a host of political and economic reasons, the Indian military has been extremely dependent upon the former Soviet Union. The disintegration of the USSR has seriously hampered the procurement of spare parts by India. Some believe that certain critical areas within the Indian military force structure are maintained through cannibalism. The enormity and suddenness of the change in the availability of spare parts, coupled with limitations on domestic resources, make a major military modernization by India an unrealistic proposition in the foreseeable future. New Delhi's short-term defense preparedness, therefore, depends upon its ability to obtain crucial parts and to upgrade its existing forces.

Even though Indian leaders are keen to reestablish close military relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), it is imperative for India to look for alternatives and loosen its military dependence upon Moscow. In this endeavor, Israel's experience and expertise in upgrading and prolonging Soviet

weapons systems naturally becomes the most important and highly visible realm of military collaboration between India and Israel.

#### **Upgrading Indian-Defense Industries**

State ownership has seriously hampered the efficiency and functioning of India's defense industries. Over the years they have become yet another labor-intensive government department unconcerned about productivity and profits. However, the on-going economic liberalization initiated and pursued by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in recent years has radically changed the ground rules and all the major defense industries and research institutions are being compelled to adjust to the new economic realities. Their survival in an era of dwindling government subsidies means modernization, restructuring, and exports. Israel's experience in these fields would be immensely useful for Indian defense industries.

#### **Preventing Infiltration**

India's long coastline and remote and far-flung borders substantially accentuate the menace of cross-border infiltrations. The flow of illegal aliens often leads to security, economic, political and social complications. The prolonged terrorism in Punjab, political instability and social unrest in certain northeastern states, and the on-going turmoil in the Himalayan state of Kashmir can be partly attributed to this phenomenon. In certain cases the influx of foreigners through unguarded or vulnerable borders endangers the delicate social balance in the border states. Israel's success in substantially reducing, if not eliminating, infiltration from neighboring countries is an area which is of practical use in India.

#### **Research and Development**

Indo-Israeli military cooperation could also be beneficial in areas where there is on-going research in both countries. While many Western observers consider numerous Indian projects to be white elephants, there is a domestic consensus that the import of critical modern technology is essential for their success and Israel is often suggested as a possible source for such technology.

For example, the battlefield experience of the Merkava tank under extremely hot and hostile desert conditions could provide useful insights to help overcome some of the current shortcomings of India's Arjun main battle tank. Likewise, Israel's overall aircraft development experience and particularly the

avionics developed during work on its Lavi aircraft might be of use to the Light Combat Aircraft program currently underway in India. Additional Indian military development projects that might benefit from Israeli innovations in the field include the \$270 million Integrated Guided Missile Program that aspires to develop and produce five types of missiles including the 2,500 km. Agni Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile. There are also the ambitious plans for launching commercial satellites. Research and development pertaining to offensive and defensive anti-missile systems and defenses would be useful to India, all the more so when there are no significant domestic endeavors in this direction. The same may be said about the development and deployment of remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs). India's inaccessible mountainous terrain and vast coastline and economic zone makes it a potential market for Israeli products. There are indications that Israeli-made RPVs are undergoing field trials in India.

#### **Counter-Terrorism**

Since the early 1980s, terrorism has emerged as a serious problem for India, and its various national institutions, installations and agencies have become prime targets and victims. Some of this terrorism originates from or is supported by Middle Eastern sources. In addition to the exchange of vital information pertaining to terrorism, cooperation with Israel should enhance and improve India's ability to confront and minimize, if not eliminate, terrorism.

There are indications that even before normalization, Israel advised India on ways to protect its national leaders and safeguard vital installations. In the wake of full relations, the prolonged and hitherto unknown high-level cooperation between the intelligence agencies of the two countries is coming to light.

Likewise, India is often plagued with massive demonstrations that quickly degenerate into confrontations, communal riots and bloodshed. In this regard, India can learn and benefit from Israel's operational experience in combatting and controlling violent demonstrations.

#### **Self-Sufficiency**

The collapse of Eastern Europe and the growing technological protectionism in the U.S. is bound to invigorate India's drive for self-sufficiency. Unlike the past, there is now a sense of urgency. The prolonged dependency upon Moscow for military procurement made New Delhi extremely vulnerable to outside pressure and manipulation.

Israel faced a much worse situation soon after its spectacular military victory in June 1967. With hindsight one can conclude that the French embargo on military sales to Israel proved to be a blessing in disguise and fueled Israel's drive for military self-sufficiency. Through various ingenious and at times controversial and questionable means, Israel has attained the ability to produce a whole range of weapons systems. Within a short period of time but at an extremely economical cost, Israel has emerged as one of the important arms suppliers in the world. Israel's ordeal and experience can be suitably adapted to the present Indian situation.

#### **Battlefield Experience**

India can learn much from Israel's experience with American weapons systems. Since much of the modern Pakistani military equipment is supplied by Washington, this knowledge assumes strategic importance. In the same way, New Delhi's experience with Eastern European inventories would be useful for Israel. Moreover, extending the life span of Soviet inventories is not totally new to India and for quite some time India has succeeded in integrating Soviet frames and platforms with Western fire control and guidance technology. Likewise, both could learn from each other's experiences in desert warfare and high altitude combat.

#### **The New International Environment**

Any security-related cooperation between Israel and India is likely to be influenced by three important considerations: the new international environment, the recession in Israel's defense industries, and India's appreciation of Israeli battlefield experience.

Ever since the Madrid conference, the international climate has been favorable to Israel. When the Palestinians and other Arab countries are engaged in political and economic negotiations with the Jewish state, India can conduct its relations with Israel in a much more relaxed manner.

India's preoccupation with Pakistan has been one of the factors that influenced its reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with Israel soon after its recognition in 1950. Every now and then the media in Pakistan would warn the population of an existing, imminent or impending "Indo-Israeli collaboration against the Islamic world." For years, important groups in India and Israel unsuccessfully sought to forge an anti-Muslim alliance. However, such a parochial approach to cooperation, especially in the realm of security, is not in the long-term interest of either country.

Both India and Israel can ill-afford to make opposition to Islamic fundamentalism their main plank and thereby antagonize the Islamic world. India must take the Pakistan factor into consideration and, for its part, in the post-Oslo phase, Israel is seeking to dilute the Islamic content of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Towards this endeavor, Israel is seeking to move closer to the Islamic world and has even sought India's help in establishing diplomatic relations with Islamic countries in Asia.

Moreover, because times have changed, in 1994 Israel is seeking formal ties with Islamabad. The latter's repeated accusations of collaboration between Indian and Israeli intelligence agencies in Kashmir have failed to generate any support in the Middle East. Therefore, India need not be unduly worried over Pakistan.

#### **Recession in Israel's Defense Industry**

Ever since the cancellation of the Lavi aircraft project, Israeli defense industries have been in the midst of a recession. A host of national and international developments have proven detrimental to their growth and maintenance. Reduction in procurement by the IDF due to budget cuts, reduced international tension and hence demand, the end of the Cold War and subsequent availability of huge military stocks from the Eastern bloc, and the proliferation of new suppliers have worsened the situation.

As a result, within a decade over 30,000 jobs were lost in the Israeli defense industries and all the major defense firms are in the process of "restructuring," a euphemism for massive job cut-backs. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin remarked in November 1992, "The nations of the world are not buying weapons anymore, and there is no place to sell the weapons." Since defense industries employ high-cost labor, conversion is not easy either. Under these circumstances, India appears to be an attractive target for Israeli endeavors. In short, a marriage is possible between Indian requirements and Israeli surpluses.

Even during the prolonged absence of diplomatic relations, Israel enjoyed the admiration of the Indian elites, especially the military leadership. As such, Israel's military experience is not an unknown commodity in India. While some of the expectations are unrealistic, the awareness of and interest in Israeli security expertise should facilitate and enhance a steady growth in military relations.

#### **Some Limitations to Cooperation**

Any serious appraisal of possible military cooperation between Israel and India should also take the following limitations into consideration:

Like many circles in Israel and elsewhere, some Indians view the former to be the "back door" to the U.S. Frequent pressure exerted by various pro-Israel groups in the United States has reinforced this perception. Indian and Israeli experts frequently talk about their common goal towards the review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995. This aspect apparently figured during Foreign Minister Shimon Peres' brief visit to India in mid-1993.

In the post-Cold War era, Washington has taken a belligerent position towards India's nuclear and missile "proliferation." For example, in 1993, succumbing to U.S. pressure, even a traditional friend like Moscow broke off its earlier commitment to supply cryogenic engine technology to India. While the actual impact of the pressure campaign has yet to halt or cap India's missile or nuclear programs, various punitive measures have hindered critical projects, delayed their time schedule, and made them more expensive. Faced with these harsh realities, some circles view Israel as an alternative source of critical Western technologies.

But due to its dependence upon the U.S. and its commitments to Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) regulations, Israel's options for cooperation in highly sensitive areas will be extremely limited. Frequent U.S. media accusations of Israeli wrongdoing further complicate matters.

In short, while it could supply small arms and modern avionics, Israel's ability and willingness to circumvent American sanctions toward India in order to supply much needed critical technologies to that country would be extremely limited.

#### **Overcoming Historic Mutual Indifference**

For years, both countries were indifferent toward one another. India looked at Israel only within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and never paid serious attention to its expertise and experience. For its part, Israel looked at India only in a philosophical and historical context, and as a land of snake-charmers. None of Israel's institutions of higher learning pay serious attention to contemporary India. In other words, prior to establishing any serious security relations, each must come to terms with the other's present political reality.

### Indian Domestic Political Pressures

With all its imperfections and limitations, India has maintained its democratic framework. Ironically, this may prove to be a major handicap to India's developing full-fledged security ties with Israel. Given India's 110-million-strong Muslim minority, and its historical, political, and economic ties with the Arab and Islamic world, any close military ties with Israel would have to be handled with extreme care and prudence, all the more so when a section of the Indian intelligentsia views even the belated normalization of relations as a hasty and unnecessary move.

### Alternative Options for India

Some of India's modernization plans in the pipeline today are extremely attractive and various Western nations are vying with each other to secure the deals. In the most lucrative MiG upgrading market, Israel is facing tough competition from a number of countries, especially the Russians. While certain Indian military circles favor Israel, Moscow is believed to have linked upgrading to its continued goodwill and cooperation in other areas of defense cooperation. With New Delhi's arms-related debts standing at \$12-15 billion, Russia has an additional advantage over Israel.

In other words, notwithstanding Israel's qualitative advantages in avionics and costs, Russia's pressure could be too great to be lightly brushed aside. Moreover, the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, which produces MiGs under license in India, is keen on entering the global MiG upgrading market.

After protracted negotiations, in early May 1994 India signed a deal with Russia for the upgrading of around 100 MiG-21s. While Moscow would upgrade the airframes and radar, Israel is being mentioned as one of the possible collaborators in providing avionics.

Among the new entrants in the market, post-apartheid South Africa is emerging as an important player in the arms bazaar and is likely to be a stiff competitor. In other words, through the less controversial South African route, India might be able to obtain at least some of the Israeli products and technology it seeks. While they are likely to be less sophisticated than those available from Israel, they are likely to be more sophisticated than those currently available in India.

The present scarcity of adequate spare parts in India is partly due to the financial difficulties facing the government. Due to its dependency upon financial aid and assistance from international institutions, India's

options for a full-scale defense modernization are exceedingly narrow. Despite domestic economic hardships and its dependence upon substantial financial aid and assistance from the West, in April 1992, Russia granted India a two-year, \$830 million loan for military purchases, which was further extended until 1996.

In light of this development, India's ability to conclude any massive arms deal with Israel would be limited, especially if one considers Israel's inability to offer credits and deferred payment. Moreover, it would be financially beneficial for India to prefer technology transfer and to produce the needed arms locally.

### Exploring a Range of Prospects

In summary, there are a number of security areas in which there is significant scope for cooperation, understanding, and even joint research between Israel and India. Given adequate attention and care, a whole range of mutually beneficial areas can be identified, paving the way for economic prosperity and security for both countries.

Since India's plans for defense modernization are severely handicapped by a severe lack of financial resources, Israel's expertise in upgrading and modernizing Russian and Western weapons systems and its success in arms exports become important. Security cooperation with India could bring immediate financial benefits to the recession-ridden Israeli defense industries. As relations develop, it should not be difficult for Israel and India to cooperate in research and development. In short, on-going research in both the countries can complement one another.

Yet it is necessary to understand potential opposition to any security-oriented relations. While India faces significant domestic opposition to any such moves, various regional countries and powers are likely to take a different attitude toward such cooperation. Moreover, for too long both countries have neglected one another and failed to take cognizance of each other's potential and strengths. The time has come to open a new and mutually beneficial chapter in Israeli-Indian relations.

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