

The Indian-Israeli Entente

by Efraim Inbar

Efraim Inbar (inbare@mail.biu.ac.il) is a professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University and director of the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies. His books include *Outcast Countries in the World Community* (1985), *Rabin and Israel's National Security* (1999), and *The Israeli-Turkish Entente* (2001). The author thanks Alexander Levi and particularly Elisheva Brown for their research assistance. The BESA Center provided the financial support and the appropriate intellectual atmosphere for conducting the research for this article.

India and Israel both represent ancient civilizations and share a British colonial past. They were the first states to become independent (in 1947 and 1948, respectively) in the post-World War II wave of decolonization. Both were born out of messy partitions and have maintained democratic regimes ever since under adverse conditions. But despite the two states' similarities, it took more than four decades for them to establish a warm relationship including full diplomatic relations, flourishing bilateral trade, and strategic cooperation. The strategic aspect of this relationship—a post-Cold War phenomenon—is the focus of this article. The rapprochement between India and Israel is an important component of a new strategic landscape in the greater Middle East that includes Central Asia and parts of the Indian Ocean littoral.

Historic Background

As part of the Asian continent, Israel has been interested from its inception in good ties with Asian states, China and India in particular. Arab hostility made Israel a regional pariah and forced Jerusalem to leap beyond its Arab neighbors in search of friends and markets. The margins of the Middle East—Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia—were the primary targets of its periphery doctrine,¹ but it paid significant attention to Asian states, too. For a while, it was quite successful, for example in Burma (Myanmar). Generally, though, making inroads East was not easy, given that Asian societies perceived of

¹Israel's first premier, David Ben-Gurion, developed the periphery doctrine. For its implementation, see Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel and the World After 40 Years* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1990), pp. 92, 168–9, 236.

Israel as a largely Western phenomenon and were culturally disparate from Jewish society.

India recognized Israel in September 1950 but did not establish full diplomatic relations, allowing only the opening of a consulate in Bombay in 1953. Most of the leadership within India's then-ruling Congress Party linked the Zionist enterprise to Western colonialism. Israel was even less acceptable to it for having been established out of the partition of Palestine, an unacceptable idea in the Indian context. Moreover, Muslims tended to support the Arab cause, and the Indian government was loath to estrange its Muslim minority. Israel, which courted a nonaligned foreign policy in its early years, was keen on improving relations with New Delhi, one of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) leaders, but with little success.² Pressures from the Arab bloc dissuaded India from accepting Israel's overtures and led to NAM's adopting an anti-Israeli policy. Israel's gradual identification as an American ally over the 1960s further hindered good relations with India, which was highly suspicious of American foreign policy.

The limited military assistance Israel rendered to India in its 1962 confrontation with China and the Indo-Pakistani wars (1965, 1971), as well as low-key cooperation between their intelligence services over the years, elicited no change in New Delhi's approach to the Jewish state. Even the 1979 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel made no dent in the formal hostility displayed by the Indian political elite against Israel. From 1982 to 1988, India did not even allow full consular relations.³

India's change in attitude toward Israel took place with the end of the Cold War in 1991. As India reassessed its foreign policy in view of the fall of the Soviet Union—its ally during most of the Cold War—from superpower status, it also reconsidered its relations with Israel, weighing the diplomatic benefits it had derived from downgrading relations with Israel and maintaining a pro-Arab voting record at the UN against the possible benefits to be accrued by becoming closer to Jerusalem, given Israel's significant role in the Middle East.⁴

India's domestic politics also played a role. The Congress Party lost the 1989 elections and did not form a coalition government until after the June 1991 national elections. The ascendance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian political system removed some hesitations about Israel. To the BJP, with its nationalist, Hindu outlook, the Jewish state was not so much a

² Yaakov Shimoni, "India: The Years of Estrangement," in Moshe Yager, Yoseph Govrin, and Ariyeh Oded, eds., *Ministry for Foreign Affairs: The First Fifty Years* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002), p. 539–40.

³ Moshe Yager, "Fundamental Factors in Asia-Israel Relations," in Yager, Govrin, and Oded, *Ministry for Foreign Affairs*, p. 534; Giora Bachar, "The Normalization in Indian-Israel Relations," *ibid.*, p. 543.

⁴ Moshe Yager, "How Was Normalization Achieved in Indo-Israeli Relations?" *Nativ* (Hebrew), Jan. 2003), pp. 1–11; Bachar, "The Normalization in Indian-Israel Relations," pp. 543–49.

diplomatic burden as a potential ally against Pakistan and radical Islam. Indeed, the BJP convention of October 1991 introduced a clause calling for full relations with Israel. Finally, the economic liberalization initiated by Prime Minister Narasima Rao, which depended heavily on economic and technological interactions with the West, also argued for normalization. Israel was part of the new globalized economy India wished to join.⁵

Several factors that had inhibited upgrading relations with Israel had also disappeared. First, changes in the energy sector had lessened the political leverage of the Arab oil-producing states. Already by the end of the 1980s, fears of energy crises had subsided substantially. As the oil market became a buyers' market, the weight of Arab objections to the enhancement of relations with Israel diminished.

Second, the Arab-Israeli peace process, reactivated with great fanfare by the United States after the 1991 Gulf War, further marginalized the objections of Israel's regional enemies to ties of third parties with Jerusalem. The October 1991 peace conference in Madrid, to which almost all Arab countries sent senior diplomatic delegations, served as an opportunity for hitherto reluctant states to develop a closer relationship with Israel.

India signaled to Israel its willingness to gradually upgrade its relations, but Israel rejected incremental steps, insisting on full diplomatic relations before India could participate in the multilateral framework initiated at Madrid. New Delhi had many interests in the Middle East (oil, foreign workers, radical Islam) and was highly interested in the multilateral track initiated at Madrid, particularly in arms control and regional security. An official announcement of full diplomatic relations came on January 29, 1992, specifically linked to Prime Minister Rao's upcoming visit to the United States.

India was not the only country to warm towards Israel. Russia, China, and Turkey also capitalized on the changed circumstances to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. Other Asian states, such as Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, renewed their diplomatic ties with Jerusalem in that period. India did not want to lag behind China, which had been gradually improving its relations with Israel since the 1980s. The upgrading of relations was therefore part of a larger, global post-Cold War phenomenon of wanting to normalize relations with a growingly important international actor which possessed advanced technologies and excellent relations with Washington. Israel took the opportunity to improve relations with countries once in the Soviet orbit (Eastern Europe and Central Asia) and many others previously reluctant to have fully-fledged relations with Jerusalem.

A stream of reciprocal visits by senior officials attempted to give specific content to the relationship. Israeli president Ezer Weizman's visit to India in December 1996 signaled the new bilateral warmth. The two states

⁵P. R. Kumaraswami, "India-Israel: Emerging Partnership," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Dec. 2002, p. 198.

signed various trade agreements and initiated joint agricultural and industrial projects. Direct airline connections were established. By 2002, bilateral trade reached \$1.5 billion, seven times larger than the 1992 volume (\$202 million). India became Israel's second largest trading partner in Asia, after Hong Kong. Cultural contacts intensified, with none of the backlash feared from India's Muslim community. By the late-1990s the two countries had discovered their common outlooks on disputes in their regions, as well as a common strategic agenda.⁶ The American decision of January 1999 to lift the sanctions it imposed after India's May 1998 nuclear tests removed a serious obstacle in Jerusalem's relations with New Delhi, paving the way for achieving even closer ties. September 11 and the war on terror appeared to create a climate even more conducive to Indo-Israeli collaboration. This closeness was reflected in the historic September 2003 visit of Ariel Sharon to India, the first ever by an Israeli prime minister. The high-profile visit was an opportunity to enhance each other's understanding at the highest levels and to further promote bilateral defense and trade ties.⁷

Outlook on Regional Disputes

Both India and Israel have engaged in protracted conflict and waged several major wars against their neighbors: India against China and Pakistan, and Israel against Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Both are continuously challenged by low-intensity conflict and terror, and both have rivals who possess WMD.

India, like Israel, feels beleaguered in its own region. It fears that Pakistan seeks its disintegration and is attempting to engage it in a proxy war by supporting Muslim-separatists terrorism. Furthermore, despite adroit diplomacy to reduce Sino-Indian tensions, most of the Indian strategic community believes that China's massive economic progress has threatening national security dimensions.⁸

Israel's strategic situation has improved considerably over the past two decades, with the Arab-Israeli peace process and favorable changes in the international system, particularly the emergence of the United States, its long-time supporter, as the hegemonic world power. Nevertheless, its existential fears have not been lessened by the pursuit of WMD by some of its foes—Iraq (until the 2003 American takeover), Iran, Libya, and Syria.

⁶ P. R. Kumaraswami, *Israel and India. Evolving Strategic Partnership*, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 40 (Ramat Gan: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, September 1998).

⁷ Amy Waldman, "The Bond between India and Israel Grows," *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 2003.

⁸ Stephen P. Cohen and Sumit Ganguly, "India," in Robert Chase, Emily Hill, and Paul Kennedy, eds., *The Pivotal States. A New Framework for U.S. Policy in the Developing World* (New York: Norton, 1999), pp. 50–51.

Within their respective regions the two states are involved in protracted conflict characterized by complex ethnic and religious components. Both feel that the international community fails to understand their conflicts. New Delhi has seen international pressure on Islamabad to act more determinately against terrorism give way to pressure on New Delhi to make it more worth Pakistan's while to end terrorism.⁹ Israelis feel that the burden is on them to make concessions to the Palestinian leadership, under the problematic assumption that the latter must be able to show achievements to its constituency in order to muster support for ending the violence. Both India and Israel take the position that they will not negotiate as long as their rivals support terrorism, a position that other nations often view as unnecessarily hard.

The threat to the two nations is the same: radical offshoots of Islam in the greater Middle East. India regards Saudi Arabia in particular as a hub for Islamic extremism and is wary of the Saudi-Pakistani relationship. For Israel, the Islamic radicals in the Arab world and Iran constitute a constant security challenge. The combination of Iran's hatred and its nuclear potential constitute a clear threat to Israel, in the same way as Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, which could fall into the hands of Islamic radicals, does to India. This explains both states' support for the development of anti-ballistic missile defense systems. Israel's remarkable success in deploying the Arrow-2 missile (mostly funded by the United States), along with its advanced research in military technologies, has aroused keen interest in India.

India and Israel fear that the Kashmir and Palestinian conflicts could destabilize their regions in a way that would attract unwanted external intervention. Both want the United States in particular to confine itself to the role of mediator in the disputes. To that end, India continues to work with the United States to try to defuse regional tensions.¹⁰ For example, American diplomacy backed by the Indian military persuaded Islamabad to draw back from the 1998 Kargil confrontation and helped reduce tensions in 2002.

The two states differ, however, in their global orientations. When the Soviet Union collapsed, India lost its main source of diplomatic support and military technology. Despite the recent improvement of its relations with Washington, New Delhi still prefers a multipolar world in which it can have greater latitude and perhaps play a larger role in international affairs. In contrast, for Israel, the demise of the Soviet Union, an ally of its Arab enemies, was a clear bonus, and American hegemony suits its needs. The United States is the great power most supportive of its positions and most sensitive to Israeli needs in formulating its Middle East policies. Moreover, the existential dangers to Israel did not disappear in the post-Cold War world, and any rising competitor of Washington, e.g. China, is likely to take the Arab side.

⁹ K. Shankar Bajpai, "Untangling India and Pakistan," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2003, p. 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

The Common Strategic Agenda

Defense ties

The Indian defense establishment has always been less hostile toward Israel than the Indian government has been. In following Israel's achievements on the battlefield and in weapons production over the years, the military developed a professional appreciation of Israel's strategic predicament and military performance. India gradually overcame its inhibitions and engaged in security cooperation with Israel. In March 1995, Israel's air force commander paid an official visit to India, and his Indian counterpart reciprocated in 1996. Abdul Kalam, at that time chief of the Indian Defense Research and Development Organization, also made a visit that year. In April 1997 New Delhi sent its first military attaché, marking a new era in the bilateral relationship. Home Minister Krishna Advani said during a well-publicized June 2000 visit to Israel that he aimed for strengthened cooperation in all fields.

Yet the evolving relationship is definitely not a military alliance. Neither side wants to be drawn into the regional conflict of the other. Both emphasize that their defense ties are meant only to enhance national self-defense capabilities and stability and are not directed against any third party. Israel definitely does not want to be seen as Pakistan's enemy,¹¹ and it displays considerable caution in its relations with China. Likewise, India has both political and economic interests in the Arab world, a history of supporting the Palestinians, and a growing Indian diaspora in the Gulf. Its views on Iran, Pakistan's neighbor, differ from Israel's. Nevertheless, there are significant overlapping concerns and areas for potential cooperation.

Defense ties include weapon procurement, plans for co-producing military equipment, and cooperation in counterterrorism and low-intensity conflict. Lately, the two states have also developed ties in the area of space activities.

Arms and Technology Transfers. India's quest for the latest military technologies complements Israel's need to broaden the market for its military products. India's key indigenous defense projects, such as the Arjoun main battle tank and the light combat aircraft, have incurred significant cost and time overruns. New Delhi encountered difficulties in developing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and various missiles, and with Russia unable to deliver promised weapons on budget and on schedule, it turned to Israel, which has become New Delhi's second largest defense supplier after Russia, with France ranking third.

Israeli companies are helping India upgrade some of its aging Soviet platforms. Israel has developed an excellent record over the years in

¹¹ See P. R. Kumaraswami, *Beyond the Veil: Israel-Pakistan Relations*, JCSS Memorandum, 55 (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2000).

retrofitting old military equipment of all kinds and sources, and when it comes to Russian equipment, it has the advantage of Soviet immigrants who worked as technicians and engineers in the Soviet military industry. While Israeli firms lost out to the Russians in their bid to upgrade India's Russian-made MiG-21s in 1996, they secured several contracts to supply avionics for the upgraded version. Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) has signed several large contracts with the Indian Air Force (IAF) for projects that include fitting its MiG-21 ground-attack aircraft with laser-guided bombs. Negotiations reportedly are in advanced stages for Israel to provide state-of-the-art fire-control systems and thermal imagers for the Indian Army's Russian-made T-72 tank fleet, as well as upgrading its armor.¹² Israel's Soltam Systems won the contract to upgrade Soviet 133 mm artillery pieces and is a candidate for upgrading the L-60 anti-aircraft guns for the Army.

In 1996, India purchased from Israel a sophisticated Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation system, which was installed at the Jamnagar air base. At the end of that year, the IAI's Ramta Division was awarded \$10 million to build two Dvora MK-2 patrol boats in India. In addition, Tadiran Communications, an Israeli company specializing in military communications, is providing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of equipment to New Delhi. Soltam has announced that it will supply tens of millions of dollars worth of artillery (155 mm self-propelled guns) to the Indian army.¹³

India's indigenous efforts to produce UAVs for attack and reconnaissance missions have yielded poor results. In 2001 its defense ministry signed a fixed-price deal with IAI at \$7.2 million per UAV. India's armed forces will need some 100 tactical UAVs in the next five years, in addition to 200 UAVs for low- and high-altitude operations. The 1999 Kargil border conflict highlighted the need for these, because the intrusions could have been spotted earlier if India had had the pilotless spy planes. In the absence of airborne warning-and-control-system aircraft, the Indian Navy too has relied on UAVs. During 2003 India signed a \$130 million contract with IAI for 18 Heron UAVs; orders for 16 additional UAVs are expected. IAI and India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) have set up a division in Hyderabad for maintenance and other services.¹⁴

After canceling the development of the Trishul anti-missile system in January 2003, India decided to mount the Israeli Barak anti-missile system on ten of its warships. Its Navy has mounted seven surface-to-air Barak systems—intended to protect ships against aircraft and stealthy, supersonic sea-skimming missiles—on its warships. A \$40-million deal was signed in April for an additional Barak system; another two will be procured by

¹² Rahul Dutta, "India, Israel Have Big Plans," *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), Jan. 21, 2003.

¹³ "Israeli company targets arms sales to India", Press Trust of India (PTI), BBC Monitoring South Asia, New Delhi, Feb. 5, 2003.

¹⁴ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India Relies on Israel for UAV Needs," *Defense News*, Feb. 24, 2003.

year-end; and ten more over the next five to seven years, bringing the total to twenty.¹⁵

In 2003, India's defense forces submitted a draft proposal to buy \$1.5 billion worth of radar systems, which the Indian Ministry of Defense considered favorably. This proposal is separate from the ABM radar systems (such as Arrow-2, Phalcon, and Green Pine) that India is already negotiating to buy from Israel. State-owned Bharat Electronics Ltd. of India has offered its radar systems, but a senior Indian Army official said that these radars are inferior to the overseas manufacturers' products. Israeli firms such as IAI and Elbit have bid on this project. El-Op has offered to supply transportable radar systems, and IAI subsidiary Elta has also shown interest in this market.¹⁶ IAI is also pitching its products to meet the Indian Navy's and Air Force's command-and-control requirements and eyeing the contract to upgrade more than 200 MiG-27 aircraft with situation-awareness systems.

India renewed its efforts to procure effective air defenses after Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests. It has approached Israel on the subject of the airborne Phalcon radar, to be mounted on the Russian built IL-76 transport aircraft; the long-range Green Pine radar, which is able to identify the launch of missiles at great distances; and the Arrow-2 ABM system. The Phalcon and the Arrow-2, a U.S.-Israeli joint-development system, require American approval, which was granted for Phalcon in May 2003 but is still pending for Arrow-2.

According to Indian defense analysts, the success of U.S. forces fighting Russian-made Iraqi weaponry made Indian military planners think twice about depending heavily on Russia. This means that India is likely to be more interested in Western equipment, including Israeli-made weapon systems. Moreover, according to an Indian Ministry of Defense official, military planners have asked the government to buy electronic warfare equipment only from vendors that do not sell such equipment to Muslim countries.¹⁷ This often gives Israel an advantage over American and French competitors.

Co-production. Co-production plays to Israeli firms' research and design strength and Indian firms' manufacturing strength. IAI and HAL already cooperate on several upgrade programs for the IAF involving Russian-origin platforms. Nalini Rajanti Mohanti, the chairman of HAL, cited joint Indian-Israeli upgrades of MiG-27 as a prime example of such co-production.¹⁸ In September 2002, HAL and IAI reached an agreement to jointly produce an Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH). The ALH is designed for attack, intelligence gathering, and anti-tanks and anti-submarine operations. The first customer will be the Indian Army, which is expected to order more than 300 ALHs. The

¹⁵ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India Imports Naval Missile Defenses," *Defense News*, May 23, 2003.

¹⁶ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India's Military Seeks \$1.5 Billion in Radar Gear," *Defense News*, June 20, 2003.

¹⁷ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India Eyes Pakistan Providers," *Defense News*, May 12, 2003.

¹⁸ Barbara Opall-Rome, "Israel, Russia Establish Intellectual Property Deal," *Defense News*, Mar. 17, 2003.

state-owned Ordnance Factory Board is in advanced stages of talks with Israel Military Industries (IMI) for joint defense projects that would involve the production of Israeli designed 130 mm and 155 mm cargo projectiles, 122 mm Grad cargo projectiles, 125 mm advanced tank ammunition, and 122 cargo mortars. Similar agreements on technology transfer were reached for production of artillery. RAFAEL, Israel's weapon development authority, will provide the technology to produce in India the Spike anti-armor and the *Python-4* air-to-air missiles.¹⁹ In February 2003, IAI and India's Mumbai-based NELCO signed an agreement to develop, manufacture, and market a range of electronic products, primarily to the Indian Defense Forces.²⁰

Low-Intensity Conflict (terror and infiltration). Already in February 1992, Indian defense minister Sharad Pawar acknowledged Indo-Israeli cooperation on counterterrorism. Both states have a long history in counterterrorism activities. Their cooperation in this area, conducted out of public view, involves the exchange of information on terrorist groups, their finances, recruitment patterns, training, and operations, as well as comparing national doctrines and operational experience.²¹ After 9/11, cooperation on terrorism gained a higher priority on many countries' strategic agendas, and the West better appreciated India's and Israel's terrorism concerns.

Israel and India learn from each other on border security. Facing the challenge of Muslim fundamentalist terrorism springing from camps inside Pakistan, the Indian military aims at developing the ability to quickly deploy troops inside enemy lines for specific missions. New Delhi is also considering the establishment of a 30,000-troop rapid mobility force under the Army, reportedly training it at Israeli bases. Israel's Defense Ministry director-general Amos Yaron has denied this, but announced on a related issue that the Indian Army will be buying Israel's Tavor assault rifles, making India the first country to buy thousands of these. India recently concluded a \$30-million agreement with IMI for 3,400 Tavor assault rifles, 200 Galil sniper rifles, as well as laser range-finding and targeting equipment.²²

As India strives to close its borders to terrorist infiltration, it needs good border-monitoring equipment of the type Israel has developed over the years to meet its own infiltration challenges. Israel has also supplied India with portable battlefield radars and a wide assortment of human-movement detecting sensors, hand-held thermals, and night-vision equipment to Indian Armed Forces.²³

¹⁹ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India's Ordnance Board Looks Overseas," *Defense News*, May 26, 2003; and his "India Strives for Missile-Building Hub," *Defense News*, Feb. 24, 2003.

²⁰ "IAI, Indian Firm Start Venture," *Defense News*, Feb. 17, 2003.

²¹ *Statesman* (New Delhi), Feb. 28, 1992, quoted in Kumaraswamy, *Israel and India*; remarks of Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, National Security Advisor, in Amit Navon, "The Indian Knot," *Maariv* Weekend Magazine, Sept. 20, 2002.

²² Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India to Create Strike Force," *Defense News*, May 12, 2003.

²³ "India, Israel Defence Ties to Get a Boost," PTI, *Hindustan Times*, May 22, 2003.

Space Ventures. The space agencies of the two countries signed a cooperation agreement in November 2002. While the space programs are nominally civilian, they have clear military functions. Israel's Defense Ministry has solicited investors for its military space program, which is based on a constellation of small, relatively inexpensive, multi-mission satellites that can be launched on demand from fighter planes. When visiting Israel in August 2003, Krishnaswami Kasturirangan, chairman of the India Space Research Organization, expressed interest in the Israeli concept of small satellites and their employment, adding: "Israel has much to offer in terms of cooperative programs for the future."²⁴ The Israeli *Ofeq* spy satellite had attracted Indian attention even before this visit.²⁵

Radical Islam

Mutual fear of radical Islam, both at home and in their immediate neighborhoods, has cemented Indo-Israeli ties. For India, the 1979 Shiite revolution in Iran lent legitimacy to the Islamization efforts of General Zia Ul Haq, who took over Pakistan in 1977. It was his regime and developments in Afghanistan that energized the radical Muslims in India's region. Pakistan has encouraged the activities of extremists when doing so suited its foreign policy goals in Afghanistan and India. While Pakistan's secular military still calls the shots, the country is gradually being radicalized and indeed has the potential for being taken over by radical Islamic rule.²⁶

Although Pakistan is relatively far away, Israel observes the developments there with great concern, especially since Pakistan is a nuclear state. Intelligence reports indicate that Pakistan is the origin of the technology for the centrifuges at the Isfahan uranium enrichment complex in Iran.²⁷ An Islamic regime in Islamabad could give credence to the notion of an Islamic bomb—a tormenting scenario for Israel.

India and Israel also share fears of Saudi Arabia and its role in the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. The Saudi royal family finances many Muslim extremist activities, including attacks against Israeli and Indian targets.²⁸ Israel also wants to reduce the international leverage of Saudi Arabia, whose positions are inimical to Israeli interests. It is active in encouraging Washington to exert greater pressure on Riyadh to cease financing organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

²⁴ Barbara Opall-Rome, "Israel Seeks Partners for Military Space," *Defense News*, Aug. 18, 2003.

²⁵ "India Acquires Green Pine Radars from Israel," *Times of India*, June 28, 2002.

²⁶ For a balanced appraisal, see Stephen Philip Cohen, "The Jihadist Threat to Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2003, pp. 7–26.

²⁷ Zeev Schiff, "The Discovery of the Shehab-3," *Haaretz*, July 23, 2003.

²⁸ For an exposition of Saudi mischief, see Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Regnery Publishing, 2003).

The Islamic Republic of Iran became Israel's archenemy in the 1990s. With its inflammatory rhetoric and missile and WMD programs, Israel now fears it more than ever. Indeed, for Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, Islamic Iran, which was acquiring a nuclear capability and sponsoring terrorism, replaced Iraq as the major enemy in the 1990s.²⁹ By the end of 1999, Iran reached an advanced stage in the development of the surface-to-surface Shahab-3 missile. The two-stage missile, tested first in July 1998, was based on the North Korean Nodong, with Russian contractors upgrading its design and subsystems. Its 1,300 km range puts Israel into its striking distance. In July 2003, after a successful test, Iran announced its operational deployment.³⁰

In countering Islamic radicalism, both states developed an interest in Turkey, an alternative model for the Muslim world. Turkey is a secular state facing indigenous and external Muslim radicalism. In the 1990s Turkey and Israel developed a strategic partnership based on a complex set of common regional interests. Turkey was late to respond to Indian overtures because of its historic relations with Pakistan and the growing influence of Islamic circles at home, but the war on terror, a crucial issue for both states, put the two on the same side of the political fence. They established a joint working group for combating terrorism in September 2003, as a prelude to the visit of prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Turkey in the same month. Israel played a minor role in bringing Ankara and New Delhi closer.

India and Israel both have Muslim minorities that they fear could become fifth columns. India's Muslim minority numbers some 140 million, the second largest Muslim community in the world (after Indonesia). Part of this community is well integrated in Indian society, but the rest could potentially be radicalized. Israel's 1 million Arabs constitute almost 20 percent of its population. While most of them are law-abiding citizens, Israel is very worried about the growing appeal of Muslim organizations among them and their links to their Palestinian counterparts. In recent years, it has also witnessed a significant increase in the number of Israeli-Arabs involved in terrorist activities.

Indian Ocean

The Indian-Israeli nexus has various Indian Ocean implications. It goes without saying that India is an important international actor in the Indian

²⁹ "Interview with PM Rabin," *Bamabane*, Sept. 23, 1992. See also Stuart A. Cohen, "Israel's Changing Military Commitments, 1981-1991," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Sept. 1992, pp. 330-50.

³⁰ For an evaluation of the Iranian nuclear program, see Michael Eisenstadt, "Living with a Nuclear Iran?" *Survival*, Autumn 1999, pp. 124-48, and more recently, Douglas Frantz, "Iran Closes In Ability to Build a Nuclear Bomb," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 4, 2003.

Ocean. In recent years, however, the Indian Ocean has become an area of growing interest for Israel. Historically, Israel has seen the Indian Ocean as the transit route to countries in the East, particularly because it could not use land routes, which were blocked by hostile Arab neighbors. Jerusalem was especially interested in one of the Indian Ocean chokepoints, the Bab El Mandeb straits, through which all its exports to South and East Asia pass. Israel's past attempts to establish a military presence in Ethiopia, and, afterwards in Eritrea (following its secession), were made with the straits in mind. Kenya and South Africa, also on the Indian Ocean littoral, have similarly attracted Israel's attention.

Israel successfully established a presence in Oman in the late 1960s, supporting Sultan Qabus' counterinsurgency efforts in the Dhofar province (at that time Israel and Iran still cooperated in many areas). Oman reciprocated by being almost the only Arab country (the other was Sudan) to support Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's 1977 peace initiative. The 1991 Madrid conference improved already good relations.

Israel's main strategic concern after the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 is Iran, along the shores of the Indian Ocean. It has accordingly increased its strategic reach by air and sea. Beginning early in the 1990s Israel developed the capability to project long-distance (greater than 1500 km) air and naval power, procuring from the United States long-range F-15s and F-16s. The 1999 F-16 deal alone, which included 50 aircraft, mission equipment, and a support package, was worth about \$2.5 billion. The purchase agreement left open the option for 60 additional aircraft, and Israel is now expanding its air refueling options.³¹ To parallel its air power, Israel built an ocean-going navy. Israeli Saar-5 corvettes, which are able to stay at sea for long periods of time, have been seen in the Indian Ocean. The three new Israeli submarines are equipped with long-range cruise missile launching capability. One such missile was tested in the Indian Ocean, generating reports about Indian-Israeli naval cooperation.³² India is not averse to a greater Israeli presence in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, Israel has plans to triple its submarine force and to build additional Saar-5 corvettes. Generally, the Israeli strategic community is increasingly interested in the sea, both to provide depth and for the deployment of a submarine-based nuclear second-strike force.³³

Pakistan's burgeoning missile and nuclear weapon technologies are of concern not only to India, but also to Israel. Indian strategists stress in dialogues with their Israeli counterparts that Pakistan seeks to become a supplier of intermediate-range missiles for such countries as Iran, Libya,

³¹ Barbara Opall-Rome, "Israel Expands Refueling Options," *Defense News*, May 12, 2003.

³² "India Assisting Israeli Navy," *Times of India* (online version), June 17, 2002.

³³ See Maj. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Erel, "The Sea as Strategic Depth," *Maarachot*, Apr. 2003, pp. 46–49; and Zeev Almog, "Strategic Depth Must Be Sought in the Sea," *Haaretz*, June 26, 2003.

Saudi Arabia, and Syria, with the Saudis playing a major role in financing such deals. K. Santhanam, director of the Indian Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, stated at an Indo-Israeli strategic dialogue that “Pakistan will sell missiles to Middle East states through fronts” and that “Syria is interested in obtaining the Ghauri missile.”³⁴ Israeli fears focus primarily on the seepage of nuclear technologies, with governmental authorization or as a rogue operation, to the Arab world and Iran.

Pakistan is equally concerned by Israel’s capabilities and its military relations with India, which probably serve as a catalyst for intensifying the intra-Pakistani debate over having relations with Israel. President Pervez Musharraf has made several calls for public discussion of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, noting that other Arab and Muslim countries have done so.³⁵ Musharraf has sent such signals to Israel. The Jewish state, with no end in sight to its conflict with the Palestinians, is equally interested in normalizing its relations with important Muslim states. Cordial relations with a populous Muslim country such as Pakistan or Indonesia could, like the improved Israeli-Turkish relations, help dilute the Islamic dimension in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Central Asia

India has long-standing strategic and cultural links to energy-rich and newly accessible Central Asia.³⁶ Nowadays it describes this region as its “extended strategic neighborhood,” where it jockey with rivals China and Pakistan for influence.³⁷ Israel is as interested in this new part of the “greater Middle East.” Like India, Israel sells military equipment to Central Asian states and has a modest diplomatic and business presence there. Both Israel and India aim to limit the influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the agents for radical Islamization. They prefer the presence of secular Turkey and hope the Central Asian states will emulate the Turkish model rather than the Iranian. Both states also want the flow of oil and gas there to be unimpeded by instability. While there may be differences over the direction of planned pipelines, India and Israel are in agreement as to the desirability of low-energy prices. India’s economy needs it, while in Israel’s political assessment, low prices reduce the influence of the Arab world.

³⁴ Lecture at the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Apr. 24, 2002. The Ghauri, developed in the 1990s with Chinese help, has a range of up to 1,500 km and can be tipped with a nuclear warhead. In 1998 Pakistan carried out a successful flight test of the Ghauri, and Islamabad is working on longer-range models of the missile.

³⁵ “Musharraf Calls for a Debate on Relations with Israel,” *Haaretz*, June 30, 2003.

³⁶ Cohen and Ganguly, “India,” in Chase, Hill, and Kennedy, eds., *The Pivotal States*, p. 40.

³⁷ Olga Olicker, “Conflict in Central Asia and South Caucasus,” in Olga Olicker and Thomas S. Szayna, eds., *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Implications for the U.S. Army* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003), pp. 225–6. See also, Meena Singh Roy, “India’s Interests in Central Asia,” *Strategic Analysis*, Mar. 2001, pp. 2273–89.

The Washington Dimension

New Delhi continues to suspect Washington of being a false friend because of its continued cordiality with Pakistan and China. The nascent American-Indian relationship, particularly after 9/11, has not been enough to bring India into the American fold.³⁸ New Delhi's links with Jerusalem have the potential to smooth over some of the Indo-U.S. issues.

As noted above, New Delhi believed that upgrading its relations with Jerusalem would have a positive effect on the United States' disposition toward it. The power of America's Jewish lobby is often exaggerated, but the lobby is quite effective. It did not take too much convincing to bring it onto India's side in the 1990s. The American Jewish organizations were politically astute enough to understand India's importance to the United States and Israel and the potential advantages of nurturing good relations with the Indian community in America. Cooperation between the two diasporas has the potential to magnify the voices of two communities that are small in number—about 5.2 million Jews and 1.8 million Indians—but highly educated, affluent, and attached to democratic homelands facing what is increasingly viewed as a common enemy. American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Institute on National Security Affairs, and the American Jewish Congress nourish ties with India and with the Indian lobby in Washington. Many members of the U.S.-India Political Action Committee, which was formed only in September 2002, are blunt about their desire to emulate American Jewish groups and are interested in building a long-term relationship.

The two lobbies relationship is excellent. They are working together on a number of domestic and foreign affairs issues, such as hate crimes, immigration, antiterrorism legislation, and backing pro-Israel and pro-India candidates. The Jewish-Indian alliance worked together to gain the Bush administration's approval for Israel's sale of the four Phalcon early-warning radar planes to India. Moreover, in July 2003 they were successful in getting added to a U.S. aid package for Pakistan an amendment calling on Islamabad to stop Islamic militants from crossing into India and to prevent the spread of WMD.³⁹

Indo-Israeli cooperation on weapon procurement is useful, first, to overcome American hesitations in approving sales of sophisticated equipment to India, not only equipment made in Israel but also U.S.-made

³⁸ Cohen and Ganguly, "India," p. 54. For recent analyses of U.S.-Indo relations, see Teresita C. Shaffer, "Building a New Partnership with India," *Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2002, pp. 31–44; and Robert M. Hathaway, "The US-India Courtship," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Dec. 2002, pp. 6–31.

³⁹ See, Larry Ramer, "Pro-Israel Activists Seeking Allies Among Immigrants from India," *Forward*, Oct. 11, 2002; and Alan Cooperman, "India, Israel Interests Team Up," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2003.

equipment such as advanced Patriot missiles. Notably, Washington blocked the sale of Israeli Phalcons to China. Second, India is interested in preventing Pakistan from procuring the latest American military equipment, especially aircraft. Third, India, as well as Israel, is interested in military technology transfer from the United States. While a greater American involvement in the Indian arms build-up could be at the expense of Israeli products and technology, there are enough overlapping interests to maintain collaboration.

Another area of Indian-Israeli congruence is U.S.-sponsored international arms-control regimes. Both states resisted American pressures to comply with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which is viewed in both capitals as flawed and ineffective. India does not adhere to the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and has defied the United States on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) signed in 1996 and the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT).

Israel, more vulnerable to American pressures, was ready to experiment with U.S.-backed international arms-control regimes, notwithstanding its traditional suspicion of arms control efforts and international institutions. In 1991 it accepted the MTCR, and in 1992 it signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, on which ratification is still pending. Israel also took seriously the Arms Control and Regional Security multilateral talks of 1991–96 and indicated willingness to adhere to a CTBT, which was put on the international arms control agenda in 1993. In 1998, the Israeli government even agreed to move on the FMCT. Israel refused, however, to sign the NPT, and in 1995, when this treaty was extended, the United States tacitly accepted Israel's claim for being excepted.

Israel was able to do all this without compromising its vital interests, but clearly after flirting with arms control, Israel has again become suspicious of U.S. attempts to bring it under the umbrella of international regimes. Israel and India were relieved when the Bush administration reversed some of the United States' arms-control fervor. This shift could also alleviate restrictions on missile exports and facilitate the sale of U.S. ABM systems, including the Boeing-produced Arrow-2, to India, Turkey, and/or South Korea.

A trilateral alliance could result from the new U.S.-Indian-Israeli convergence on strategic issues such as counterterrorism, missile defense, and preemption. On an official visit to the United States in May 2003, India's national security adviser, Brajesh Mishra, specifically proposed an antiterrorism alliance between the three nations.⁴⁰ "Such an alliance would have the political will and moral authority to take bold decisions in extreme cases of terrorist provocation," Mishra said in an address to the American Jewish community in Washington.

⁴⁰ "India's top security official moots India-US-Israel anti-terror axis," New Delhi (AFP), May 10, 2003.

As to U.S. support for this, the outgoing U.S. ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, often clashed with Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca in his support for Indian-U.S. defense relations and the inclusion of Israel in a strategic triad. If the United States warms up to the idea, this trilateral relationship might become attractive to India and Israel, too, if it is well defined.

Conclusion

The links between Jerusalem and New Delhi seem to be stable beyond an ephemeral convergence of their interests as sellers and buyers in the arms bazaar. Civilian trade has been booming. Opening up to the huge market in India, which is expected to become a trillion-dollar economy by 2010, has had many economic benefits for Israel. The relationship is similarly beneficial in military and economic terms for India. It seems that both states have found the right approach to putting the bilateral relationship on track and overcoming the potential for discord. As long as these countries continue to face serious national security challenges, the strategic focus of both capitals can only consolidate Indian-Israeli relations.

The relationship has wide geostrategic implications beyond the strength it gives these two regional powers. It solidifies the Arab nations' reluctant acceptance of Israel as a *fait accompli* and enhances the deterrence capability of India, a status quo power, and therefore stability in South Asia. The diplomatic traffic generated by this relationship also strengthens the links among West, Central and South Asia, giving greater credence to the notion of the Greater Middle East.

Indian-Israeli cooperation is also valuable in the U.S.-led war on terrorism. This is an important reason for Washington to lend support to the Jerusalem-New Delhi entente, similar to the American involvement in Israeli-Turkish relations, while allaying as much as possible Pakistani fears. Washington has good grounds to encourage Indian-Israeli cooperation, as its own interests in the Indian Ocean will likely grow. The Indian Ocean has gained in geopolitical importance as a number of issues, including WMD, Islamic radicalism, terrorism, and narcotrafficking, meet on its littoral. In addition, Washington should capitalize on the Indian-Israeli entente to promote closer cooperation among the Asian democracies, which face comparable security challenges—terrorism, ballistic missiles, and WMD—from U.S. rivals. Turkey, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea are prime potential additions to Israel and India in such a comprehensive security architecture.

