



Policy Paper No. 89

Indo-Israeli Strategic Cooperation as a US National Interest

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Executive Summary

After decades of political alienation and economic estrangement between India and Israel, there has been a growing convergence of Indo-Israeli interests in recent years. This strengthening rapprochement culminated in the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Jerusalem and New Delhi in 1992. Likewise, India's new policy of economic liberalization instituted in 1991 opened up many opportunities for the Israeli business sector in the Indian market, which is becoming a coveted target for many of the world's largest corporations. Both India and Israel can derive considerable mutual benefits by purposefully and systematically strengthening the bilateral bonds between themselves, and by prudently exploiting their respective comparative advantages in human and natural resources. Such a strategic partnership would embrace numerous fields on the national agenda of both nations; and with a judicious mixture of political will on the one hand, and political wisdom on the other, would allow them to achieve goals that would be beyond the reach of the separate individual capacities of either of them.

Indo-Israeli collaboration should be based on more than **a perception of common interests** prevailing at any given moment, but rather on a **common perception of interests**, which is rooted in basic shared values between the two countries, such as a deep commitment to democratic values and a strong attachment to their respective rich and ancient civilizations. Although the bilateral pay-offs for two countries seem almost immediately obvious, in both the military and economic fields, the tri-lateral (i.e. the Indo-Israeli-American) aspects of the relationship have not always been fully understood – particularly, the reasons why close Indo-Israeli strategic collaboration would not only be compatible with, but conducive to, long-term US interests. The regions of the world spanned by India and Israel include several foci which are liable to threaten the very core of liberal values that the US seeks to propagate among the community of nations. A strong Indo-Israeli alliance would create a formidable force for stability against the potential epicenters of radical fundamentalism and other hegemonic threats in Central Asia and the Middle East. It therefore appears no more than a dictate of logic that the US should actively seek to cultivate such Indo-Israeli collaboration. By so doing it would help insure that powers committed to individual liberties, freedom of expression, the right of dissent and moderation, dominate the theater of the Indian Ocean and the eastern approaches to Europe, rather than powers committed to fundamentalism and fanaticism, and which would impose on their surrounding states values that are the very antithesis of those that the American people cherish. Spheres which, *prima facie*, appear particularly amenable for initial bilateral collaboration between India and Israel and worthy of decisive US support, include activities such as: Indo-Israeli naval activity, (primarily in the field of joint logistic facilities), joint R&D projects, (both military and civilian) and cooperative efforts in solving problems of infrastructure (particularly with regard to energy and water). On a social front, India could derive considerable benefits from Israel's experience in "managing diversity" and forging a productive and cohesive society out of an extremely heterogeneous population.

In summary, it appears that the time is right for Israel to establish a special relationship with the world's largest democracy, similar to the relationship that it has developed with the world's strongest democracy. Such a "consortium" of democratic states, committed to non-violent evolution rather than violent revolution as the preferred method of global change, is likely to have a vital role in advancing the principles of liberty and pluralism, and insuring regional stability in an extensive and important portion of the world where such principles are under continual siege ■

Indo-Israeli Strategic Cooperation as a US National Interest

Introduction

Just over half a century ago two ancient peoples managed to cast off the bonds of colonial rule and assert their political independence as sovereign nation-states. At their inception, the newly born states could hardly have been more dissimilar. The one, India, was a giant subcontinent with an enormous and impoverished indigenous population. The other, Israel, was minuscule in size but eager to augment the sparse numbers of its domestic populace by large-scale immigration from countries as diverse as Morocco and Austria, Yemen and Canada.

Moreover, despite the fact that both opted for heavily state-controlled economies in their early years, the divergence between the two countries appeared to grow over time. Israel, on the one hand, gradually began to adopt an orientation increasingly conducive to free trade and private enterprise; India, on the other hand, continued to maintain its emphasis on centralized control and an aspiration for economic autarky. On the political and diplomatic front, Israel and India were estranged for several decades, with the former unequivocally aligned with the USA, while the latter opted to maintain close links with the Soviet Union.

This significant Indo-Israel disparity hardly boded well for mutual cooperation between the two nations, which remained a vision entertained only by a few far-sighted optimists. However, since the onset of the 1990s with the fall of the Soviet bloc and the accelerating liberalization of the Indian economy, considerable – even dramatic – changes have begun to take place, bringing with them a marked convergence of Indo-Israeli interests and policy goals.

The culmination of this process took place in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established between Jerusalem and New Delhi. Moreover, with the policy of economic liberalization, instituted in 1991, India and its newly accessible markets emerged as an increasingly coveted objective for many of the world largest corporations. This development was accompanied by a growing interest in economic opportunities in India on the part of the Israeli business sector. Indeed, according to recently published figures, Israeli and Indian authorities agreed to set a target of \$1 billion trade between the two countries for the year 2000.¹

However, the impressive progress made in various fields has not reduced the severity of the challenges facing India. In fact, in certain respects it may have even exacerbated them – particularly if uneven distribution of the benefits of this progress results in widening social disparities and deepening political dissent. For the country is still beset internally by many severe socio-economic difficulties, and externally by inter-state rivalries, as was dramatically illustrated by the recent fighting sparked by incursions from Pakistan into Kashmir.

Several of similar features are reflected in the realities in Israel – albeit within a significantly different structural context. Thus, in Israel, the economy has also undergone a far-reaching transformation over the last two decades – from an emphasis on state control in the 1950s, 1960s and most of the 1970s, to a growing free-market approach in the 1980s and 1990s; while on the social and ethno-cultural fronts, it too will have to contend with numerous harrowing challenges – many of which are rooted in growing socio-economic disparities and political disputes.

With regard to security, both countries face serious threats, internally and externally. In both countries there lurk dangers of dissident action by large ethno-religious minorities, fueled by a growing fundamentalism in neighboring states. Both countries face, and have faced in the past, the risk of military confrontation with largely dictatorial regimes, armed with weapons of mass destruction, (chemical, biological and/or nuclear) along their borders. Among India's potential (and indeed current) antagonists are countries and organizations which may pose a threat to Israel in time to come, or are likely to ally themselves with Israel's adversaries in some future conflict.²

In many respects, therefore, Israeli and Indian interests appear to be highly compatible. Accordingly, it seems only natural that both countries pay increasing heed to the potential mutual advantages – strategic and

economic – involved in forging closer bilateral bonds. This requires investing purposeful and systematic efforts in cultivating such ties, and in identifying spheres where cooperation in contending with common threats and/or exploiting common opportunities, are appropriate. For India, collaboration with Israel could constitute an important contribution towards the realization of Premier Vajpayee's aspiration which he expressed in the following words during his 1998 visit to the United States:

We know that India has what it takes to achieve a far higher – seven-eight percent – rate of annual GNP growth. We know that India has what it takes to emerge as a major manufacturing, trading and exporting power...³

Indeed, few who have felt the latent power, vastness and diversity of the Indian subcontinent would dispute this assessment of India's potential; and Israel's expertise and experience could, in numerous spheres, contribute significantly toward the realization of this promise.

In the consolidation of Indo-Israeli relations, collaboration in the "more practical" military and economic spheres, should be bolstered by a strengthening of cultural ties between the two nations, both of whom place great store on their respective rich and ancient civilizations. Such cooperative activities will serve to promote a climate of greater mutual understanding and closer affinity that will play an important role in the cementing of long-term bonds between the two countries.



Shared Values as the Underpinning of the Indo-Israeli Relationship: *Common Perception of Interest vs. Perception of Common Interests*

In analyzing the convergence of interests of different nations, it is important to make a substantial distinction between a **common perception of interest** on one hand, and a **perception of common interest** on the other. One relates to a perception of what is **worthy** in terms of **enduring moral merit**; the other to a perception of what is **worthwhile** in terms of **transient political pragmatism** and short-term expediency. Clearly a commonality of the former type holds the promise of a closer and more lasting relationship than does the latter. It implies a shared vision of the future rather than an *ad hoc* coincidence of transient desires. In this context, a joint relationship would be more than the sum of specific shared interests prevailing at any given time. Rather, specific interests would be derivatives of a shared perspective of a far broader framework.

For while states which subscribe to very different values may have concomitant interests at a given period and over a specific issue, such congruency is likely to be short-lived and limited. (Thus for example, while the US had little difficulty forming a coalition, which included Arab states, to confront Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War, since then it has not been able to muster Arab support for concerted action against the Iraqi despot. Such failure, at least in part, can be ascribed to the significant gap between American values and those prevailing in the Arab world.) By contrast, a high concordance of values lays the foundation for a relationship that is both broad-based and long-lasting. (The enduring agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States on the issue of Iraq may at least, in part, be attributed to the close affinity between the values on which both the British and American societies are based.) In such relationships not only are the areas of cooperation likely to be more common, but also the foci of conflict are likely to be less prevalent. Moreover, (and perhaps of greatest importance), in such relationships, should any conflict of interest in fact arise, there is a far better prospect of it being resolved amicably – or at least non-violently – than would be the case with regimes that subscribe to strongly differing value systems.

To a large degree, this predicted pattern of behavior is manifested in the phenomenon of what is known as "**democratic peace**", i.e. that is the absence of large-scale violence between genuine libertarian regimes. Two prominent scholars of international relations reviewed almost two decades of research and found a "near consensus" that democratically governed states rarely go to war with each other. In fact, they go further, observing that

...the proposition that democracies are generally at peace with each other is [so] strongly supported... [it] has led some scholars to claim that this finding is probably the closest thing that we have to a law in international politics.⁴

In a reference more pertinent to the Indo-Israeli context, George Segal, Director of Studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) also referred to the importance of "democratic peace". In

an article, “War and democracies” which appeared in **The Hindu** on June 12, 1999. Segal observed:

...one of the greatest examples of progress in political affairs in the 20th century is the apparent emergence of “democratic peace”, the notion that mature democracies do not go to war with one another.

Democratic peace is indeed a concept of tremendous significance. However, it has not as yet been given its rightful weight in the formulation of the foreign policies of most nations (particularly – and perversely – in that of the USA, which in many cases seems to persist in an unfounded evenhandedness in its attitudes toward libertarian and authoritarian regimes). It is therefore important that both India and Israel act vigorously to make this feature of international conduct the conceptual cornerstone and foundation for both the bilateral relations between the two countries and for the mobilization of US support in favor of their continuing strength and development. In other words, although it would not be overly difficult to enumerate a number of areas in which *ad hoc* collaboration between Israel and India would be mutually advantageous, it is the fact that both nations essentially subscribe to the principles of libertarian governance, to which they have demonstrated steadfast commitment since independence (despite conditions that have often been less than amenable), that suggests that there is potential for inducing an additional dimension of depth into the relationship.

Indian Premier Vajpayee underscored the strength of democracy in his country, pointing out that

Despite changes in government, the political system itself has remained remarkably stable. This testifies to the inherent strength and stability of democratic traditions in India.⁵

Indeed, the political milieu of both India and Israel is one that might have been expected to be highly conducive to the growth of dictatorship. Both countries have had to contend with threats to national security, periods of economic hardship, political assassination and ethno-religious rivalries. The fact that authoritarianism has not taken root in either country bears eloquent testimony to the deep-rooted commitment of both to the principles of liberty, pluralism and the right of dissent.

The natural implication here is that the future of Indo-Israeli relationships should not be left only to the political and state institutions of the two countries. For it would then be dependent on the prevailing vagaries or constraints of incumbent governments. Accordingly it should be bolstered by the more durable ties cultivated by networks of like-minded elites within civil society. Such elites often have a view of the long-term national interest which is more far-sighted, clearer and less cluttered than incumbent office bearers. They may thus be better equipped to compel politicians to engage issues which they would otherwise be loath to, or constrained from, dealing with. Such a format of relations would tend to be more multi-valent and multi-dimensional, and hence commensurately more stable and difficult to disrupt. This cannot but impinge on the setting of a shared political agenda which relates not only to what **can** be pursued in terms of **joint profits** in the **present** but what **should** be pursued in terms of **shared principles** in the **future**. Thus, the future of Indo-Israeli relations should, in many aspects, be “privatized”, at least insofar as it relates to laying the groundwork for its long-term durability.⁶

Bilateral Perspectives

It is in the context of the preceding discussion that the following analysis of potential fields of Indo-Israeli collaboration should be viewed – i.e. not only as a short-term enterprise based upon prevailing expediency, but as part of the long-term development of a continuing partnership.

On the strategic-military plane, there is an emerging recognition that Indo-Israeli collaboration is likely to yield synergetic benefits to both sides, allowing them each to reach objectives that neither can attain on its own.⁷ Given the present (and probable future) economic constraints on both countries, India’s quest for independence in technological expertise and Israel’s need to maintain a sizable defense industry in order to preserve its current qualitative superiority over its adversaries, are goals that are likely to be beyond the reach of either of them individually. (This point is elaborated on below).

While to date, most of the contacts have centered on the supply of Israeli equipment to India, or on Israeli upgrading of Indian equipment, there is room and reason for exploring more far-reaching enterprises. A

preliminary *prima facie* delineation of spheres that appear amenable to such mutually beneficial cooperation include: the development of means to enhance power projection – particularly in terms of air and naval forces; ballistic missile defense systems (BMD) including exploration of the boost phase intercept (BPI) technologies; cooperation in contending with nuclear, chemical and biological threats from non-state actors; and development of effective second-strike capabilities (particularly sea- and submarine-borne), which are essential for any credible no-first-use nuclear policy.

However, visions of large-scale, long-range cooperation should not obscure the value of collaboration in more “mundane” fields of logistics and ordnance. Indeed, the media both in Israel and India have been replete with reports of discussions regarding the provision of a wide range of Israeli military equipment to India – from security fences and surveillance equipment for installation along the Kashmir border, via the acquisition of unmanned reconnaissance aircraft, to the upgrading of the Indian air force’s fleet of MiG combat planes

On the civilian level, there appear to be numerous fields where judicious meshing of the two nations’ respective relative advantages in competitively priced human resources, abundance of natural resources,⁸ geopolitical location and geographical expanse, entrepreneurial ingenuity, technological and scientific ability, technical know-how, and managerial skills could produce synergetic benefits for both of them. Combining efforts could result in productive agricultural and industrial R&D ventures, and infrastructure (particularly relating to water and energy) ventures that would be beyond the reach of the individual capacities of either India or Israel on their own.

The Pay-Offs for Israel: For Israel, a close multi-faceted bond with India would have significant political, diplomatic and strategic benefits. Indian support for beleaguered Israel on the international stage would constitute a significant contribution towards dispersing much of the animosity manifested towards it in many international organizations and help it break out of the cycle of censure whenever it endeavors to defend its vital interests assertively. (Indeed, Israel only seems to receive international approval when it accedes to the demands and pressures of those urging concessions from it.)

Strategic collaboration with India would afford Israel a welcome broadening of the base of its strategic reliance.⁹ It should however be clear that, at least for the foreseeable future, such collaboration can be expected only to augment and complement, rather than supplant or replace, Israel’s present reliance on the US. Such collaboration could broadly follow the lines of the growing Turko-Israeli cooperation, which of course would dispel any basis for claims that it could be construed as “anti-Moslem”.

For Israel the importance of such strategic diversification could be profound. The country is facing escalating threats on virtually every conceivable level – from the possibility of increased low intensity conflict (LIC – including terrorist and guerrilla activity), via greater post-Oslo vulnerability to conventional attack, to the growing specter of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of surrounding adversarial states. All this is almost certainly liable to impose upon it escalating budget requirements which, for a variety of reasons, may not be met by US aid. For even if the level of US support continues undiminished at its current nominal value, it may well prove inadequate for Israel’s future defense requirements. Such a situation may arise because of (a) inflationary erosion of the real value of the US aid package; (b) the spiraling costs of new advanced weapons systems, over and above the rate of general inflationary rises; (c) real increases in defense requirements (both operational and intelligence) to contend with new emerging threats, which the US may be unwilling or unable to shoulder. In this regard, Kumaraswamy warns that “[n]otwithstanding the favorable intentions of the current US administration... Israel’s long-term plans are in jeopardy and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the US to justify huge economic and military aid to Israel, classified as a developed country with an annual per capita income in the whereabouts of \$20,000.”¹⁰ Thus diversification of Israel’s strategic reliance would be a natural, albeit partial, method of addressing this potential difficulty.

It is in this context that the following points should be given serious consideration:

- **Cost sharing and purchase agreements** with the Indian military may make projects, previously discarded because of high development costs, feasible by the sharing of these costs and by increasing the volume of ensured demand for the end-product. As was pointed out previously, in order to

preserve its technological edge over its adversaries, Israel needs to maintain a considerable military industry of its own. However, as Klieman and Pedatzur point out:

Developing new systems before receiving orders from the defense establishment requires investment too great for Israeli industry to finance on its own. ...[Accordingly] the industry has two choices: either abandon all efforts to develop the system, or to find a foreign partner willing to finance the development costs in exchange for a prescribed partnership arrangement during the course of the program...¹¹

Indeed, just how essential exports have become for Israel's ability to maintain its military production (and hence her qualitative edge) can be gauged by the assessment of the Director General of Israel's Ministry of Defense, Ilan Biran, that for the country's defense industries to be viable, they cannot depend on the Israeli market, but must designate 75% of their sales for export.¹² Accordingly, since "[e]ven if third party exports are ruled out, India still presents a large market for Israel,"¹³ securing Indian acquisition of Israeli equipment would provide an attractive solution towards alleviating (albeit not eliminating) some of the financial burdens on Israel's weapons research and development.

- ***Funding of R&D for ventures outside the framework of US aid package.*** However, notwithstanding its potential, the Indian market for finished products from Israel is liable to be limited. Thus, instead of viewing India solely as a market for exports to subsidize its defense research and development, Israel could exploit India's desire to acquire advanced technological prowess based, to as large a degree as possible, on indigenous and autonomous proficiency. This would involve embarking on long-term development of technological capabilities that serve the specific strategic needs of both nations, and which are unlikely to be satisfactorily provided or developed by other sources. From Israel's point of view, such projects may include enterprises which the US is unwilling or unable to undertake, and which dovetail with India's long-term aspirations. Among the more ambitious of these could be development of technologies which the US is precluded from advancing because of treaty obligations (such as the ABM treaty), or for which insufficient funds are available due to internal US political reasons (such as in the case of space-based BMD systems). In this regard, many may consider this an overly optimistic, naive and excessively futuristic view of the potential of Indo-Israeli relations. Such skeptics, however, would probably also have scoffed at the suggestion that computers that once required multi-storied buildings to house them, would one day fit snugly into an everyday briefcase. Indeed, given the fact that the combined GDP of both countries is in the region of \$500 billion, allocation of even a fraction of a percentage of this to such projects would make considerable resources available for their advancement. Such resources, together with expertise, ingenuity and exigency are likely to yield results that greatly enhance the prospects of implementation of concepts presently considered unfeasible. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the total annual US expenditure on BMD projects in recent years has been less than one percent of the combined Indo-Israeli GDP. Even if India and Israel were jointly to spend this entire sum on collaborative projects, Israeli defense expenditure would still be well below the levels of the late 1980s (when it was over 20% of GNP), while India's defense budget (currently around 2-3% of GDP), would remain well below the present Israeli levels (around 10% of GDP).¹⁴ However, if even a fraction of this sum were dedicated to focused BMD objectives, such as BPI technologies, rather than the whole range of missile defense alternatives, there seems little doubt that considerable advances would be highly probable. It is also highly likely that the civilian spin-offs would result in significant contributions to future GDP, thus compensating for present allocations for defense spending.
- ***Indo-Israeli naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean*** geared toward the development of a logistic infrastructure that would facilitate sea-borne second strike capability. In the future, joint Indo-Israeli naval cooperation may well assume vital importance, particularly because possible advancements in satellite surveillance techniques, together with the dominant Arab presence along most of the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean could make this an increasingly problematic theater for Israel – especially in terms of maintaining deterrent retaliatory capabilities outside its ever-shrinking, post-Oslo, territorial confines.

The Payoffs for India: For India there is also prospective synergetic added value in long-term collaboration with Israel, both in the civilian and the military sectors. Israeli expertise in agriculture, and hi-tech

development on the one hand, and experience in military and security related matters on the other, could bring considerable benefit to India.

On the socio-economic level, there is also much that India should gain from Israeli experience in “managing diversity” and forging a highly productive society out of an extremely heterogeneous population. For India there can hardly be a challenge of higher priority than mobilizing its vast human resources with greater effectiveness. There is nothing that would do more to accelerate – indeed jump start – the increase in the country’s GDP per capita and catapult it into the forefront as a global economic powerhouse. There is nothing that would contribute more toward the realization of the Vajpayee vision of India becoming “a major manufacturing, trading and exporting power”,¹⁵ while fulfilling his commitment to create unity by harmonizing diversity on the one hand, and to maintain diversity while preserving unity on the other.

On the military level, the recent conflagration in Kashmir in May 1999 should dispel any doubts that in many respects both countries face similar adversaries. Indeed, several months previously, the **Sunday Times** reported that India had been listed, along with Israel (and the US), as a potential target for terror groups such as that of Osama bin Laden.¹⁶ Other analysts, both Israeli and Indian, have pointed out that radical Islamic fundamentalism poses a threat to both countries.¹⁷ Lately, much has been written on the potential strategic and military benefits likely to accrue to India as a result of collaboration with Israel. As many of these potential benefits have been well documented elsewhere,¹⁸ a detailed repetition of them seems inappropriate in a paper of a broad conceptual nature such as this. Accordingly we will limit ourselves to a number of observations of a more general nature.

In many respects these potential strategic advantages for India entailed in collaboration with Israel are a complementary mirror-image of those likely to accrue to Israel as result of collaboration with India. Thus while such collaboration may help Israel reduce the cost of otherwise unaffordable research and development projects, by the same token, it would also enable India to enhance the capabilities of its military in the short run and to contribute towards the development of a high level of indigenous technological proficiency in the longer run.

Israel’s experience gained during its long and war-torn history would be invaluable to India in bolstering its security and in helping it repel those who would assail it. Israeli expertise in techniques of border surveillance, sensor technology and electronic detection could contribute toward the prevention of undetected incursions into sensitive regions along the Indian frontier such as occurred in Kashmir. Indeed, as early as 1994, reports appeared regarding negotiations over the use of Israeli techniques to secure the Line of Control (LOC) along the Indo-Pakistani frontier.¹⁹ It is of course an open question as to whether the 1999 infiltration into the Kargil regions could have been prevented had such contacts reached fruition. It does however provoke some intriguing speculation as to the potential of bilateral collaboration for contributing to the safeguarding of Indian national interests in very tangible ways.

Other areas of collaboration that could enhance the capabilities of the Indian army relate to the upgrading of many aspects of India’s military inventory. Such upgrading need not be restricted to the often cited fields of avionics, radar equipment, missile technology and other electronic systems. India could also benefit from Israel’s extensive combat experience by introducing proven improvements in the personal equipment (and therefore in the combat effectiveness) of the Indian soldier – from footwear and clothing to the type of weapons and ammunitions.

The Media, Diplomacy and Public Opinion: Coordination of Indo-Israeli Strategy: The close affinity of the adversaries of India with those of Israel underscores the logic of collaboration on issues of insurgency, terrorism and intelligence sharing in a wider context. However, beyond cooperation on such operational levels, Indo-Israeli joint action should also be harnessed in the information war, so important in an era dominated by the media. For example one objective in such an endeavor could be to press the democratic world to adopt an uncompromising policy of “**zero-tolerance**” against the scourge of terrorism and related phenomena such as incitement to aggression by dictatorial regimes. This kind of joint Indo-Israeli initiative on the media/information front could be expanded towards the crafting of **a common (or at least, coordinated) diplomatic strategy** geared toward stiffening the resolve of the democratic world in contending with growing global challenges to the core values it purports to cherish. Such a strategy should

underscore the notion of the formation of a “democratic consortium”, based on the underlying concept of “democratic peace”. The objective of this strategy would be to promote support in the US and other leading democratic states, for the idea that ties with fellow democracies (such as India and Israel) should be considered qualitatively different from those with dictatorships. Thus for example, there is a sound political rationale for applying divergent American attitudes to technological transfers from Israel to stable libertarian states on the one hand, and to repressive authoritarian states on the other. For while there is room for more leniency in the former instance, strict severity is appropriate in the latter. A joint Indo-Israeli media strategy should help articulate and propagate this distinction. Moreover, if long-term international stability is a genuine goal of the US and its major allies, then their ties with fellow libertarian states should be accorded greater value and higher priority than ties with authoritarian regimes.²⁰ In this particular regard, there may be fertile ground for practical collaboration between Jewish and Indian expatriate lobbies, in order to advance the unequivocal incorporation of “generic” liberal concepts (such as “democratic peace” and “zero tolerance of terrorism”) into the foreign policies of their host countries, and to de-legitimize the false symmetry inherent in the display of impartiality towards libertarian and authoritarian regimes.

In particular, proponents of Indo-Israeli collaboration (both lobbyists and legislators) in Washington should be activated to promote the concept of a grand Asian strategic alliance between Washington-New Delhi-Jerusalem (and Ankara), to contend with the prospect of the spread of religious radicalism and to contain other hegemonic threats in Asia.

In this regard Israeli and Indian sea power could become a factor of increasing significance. Israel’s long-term strategic need to strengthen its navy (see above) corresponds well with India’s desire to extend its maritime capabilities. New Delhi appears to be placing growing emphasis on its sea-borne prowess, primarily to patrol its enormously long (8000 km) coastline.²¹ However, there are signs of an emerging awareness of its potential as a strategic second-strike facility in the case of non-conventional attack, possibly comprising nuclear submarines²² and a locally built aircraft carrier.²³ Israeli technological expertise and lead-time in areas such as electronic support systems and countermeasures, radar surveillance and sea-to-sea missiles could be fruitfully exploited by India to create a strong sea-based deterrent force that is likely to have a stabilizing effect in the region.²⁴ Indeed, in several of these areas, there have already been reports of bilateral contacts – and in some cases contracts – for installation of Israeli equipment in the Indian navy, as well for joint development of naval systems and patrol vessels.²⁵ Israeli and Indian motives for the development of maritime power seem to have different but non-conflicting emphases. For Israel, although patrolling its 200 km. long shore line is undoubtedly important, it is primarily the need to create platforms for elusive second-strike retaliatory capabilities outside its minuscule territorial dimensions that is likely to elevate the strategic importance of its navy. For India, with its enormous land mass, although sea-borne second-strike capability is attractive, it is the need to secure the approaches to its 8000 km. long sea-front that is likely to be a more immediate objective. However, despite these differences, there still seems ample room for widening the scope of collaboration in this increasingly important, but hitherto less prominent (relative to air and land forces) aspect of military cooperation. Indeed, such Indo-Israeli maritime collaboration could constitute a formidable democratic alliance for facing down the forces of radical extremism in Western and Central Asia and beyond.

Caveats and Constraints: While there is much to make Israeli and Indian interests convergent, it must be remembered that they are not entirely identical. As sovereign nations, there will almost inevitably be issues on which the parties diverge. Such divergence may be confined to differences of emphasis, but may also relate to conflicting approaches to substance on specific topics. Thus, Israel’s growing relationship with China may impose restraints on the pace of development of Indo-Israeli ties. India on the other hand, has traditional links with the Arab world and other Islamic countries such as Iran, as well as a large Moslem minority at home. This, too, could pose impediments to an accelerated evolution of the Jerusalem-New Delhi axis. Moreover, Israel is constrained by various agreements regarding the transfer of technological know-how to third parties. These restrictions relate both to specific commitments to Washington regarding US-sourced technology, and to general treaty obligations such as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).²⁶ These limitations may well impede the progress of certain joint ventures, and hence the rate of consolidation of the ties between the two countries.

Thus while there is room for considerable optimism regarding the potential inherent in a broad-based, long-term strategic partnership between India and Israel, it is crucial that the parties be mindful of the obstacles on the road to the fruition of this potential. It is a course that needs to be navigated with sensitivity and prudence. Cultural gaps will have to be bridged, distorted perceptions rectified, differences of styles reconciled. However, if each of the parties respects the sensitivities and recognizes the limitations of the other, there is no reason why, with sufficient political will and appropriate political wisdom, the two sides should not succeed in subordinating specific differences to an overriding general confluence of wider interests. Thus, given the judicious mixture of sober circumspection and foresighted vision, there seems room for hope that just as Israel has established a special relationship with the world's strongest democracy, it could, and indeed should, establish one with the world's largest democracy.

Trilateral Perspectives

The notion of an Indo-Israeli coalition as a force for regional stability leads naturally to the final aspect of this work – the trilateral dimensions of Indo-Israeli strategic collaboration and the nature in which such collaboration is likely to impinge on US national interests. In this context, the notion of “democratic peace” is pivotal in understanding how Indo-Israeli long-term collaboration would operate to further US interests and therefore why the US should actively foster such collaboration.

Given the assumption that the US genuinely sees stability and not-violent evolution as the preferred method of change in the world, a strong Indo-Israeli partnership could well play an indispensable role in promoting such a goal. The region spanned by Israel and India includes several foci of tyranny, intolerance and theocracy that are inimical to the essence of enlightened liberal values. It therefore appears to be no more than a dictate of logic that the US, as the undisputed leader of the democratic world, should actively strive to cultivate countervailing foci of power which genuinely and autonomously embrace similar values – values of liberal pluralism rather than monolithic absolutism, of non-violent evolution rather than violent revolution, of individual liberty and freedom of choice rather than state coercion and repression.

The USA must seriously address the question of who will dominate the Indian Ocean, the eastern approaches to Europe, and south and central Asia – powers committed to the preservation of libertarian values of moderation and restraint, or powers committed to fundamentalism and fanaticism, who would impose upon their surroundings values which are the very antithesis of those which the US purports to cherish. An alliance between India and Israel, openly endorsed by the US, would create a potent stabilizing force in the region, which together with like-minded regimes (such as Turkey), could contribute significantly towards offsetting sources of upheaval and tumult liable to be injurious to American interests.

There are however considerations beyond regional stability that make a vibrant Indo-Israeli axis a clear US interest. In terms of the geo-strategic balance of power, a growing apprehension of a future Chinese challenge to US primacy will, in all probability, lead to a commensurate warming of sentiment in Washington to the notion of a regional counterweight to Chinese domination. In this regard, a powerful, progressive India bolstered by Israeli technological expertise is a prospect that would be clearly concordant with such an American goal.

However, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the policy of liberalization instituted by New Delhi, the US continued to be reticent in its relations with India. Indeed, following the Indian nuclear test in 1998, reticence turned into unequivocal opposition including the imposition of American sanctions against the country. In the wake of the May 1999 insurgency into Kashmir from across the Pakistani border, there appeared to be emerging signs of a thaw in Washington's attitude toward India and strenuous efforts should be invested in ensuring that this trend is not only maintained but strengthened. Such endeavors ought to be channeled towards promoting US recognition that strong Indo-Israeli ties are not only compatible with, but conducive to, America strategic interests. Hence fostering trilateral Indo- American-Israeli cooperation and coordination is likely to produce considerable benefits for all sides.

On the practical level, recognition of the convergence of Indo-Israeli interests with those of the US should lead to greater American leniency in interpreting the restrictions on technology transfers to India. In this

regard, Kumaraswamy suggests that involving US companies in Indo-Israeli joint ventures may make Washington more forthcoming in its attitudes.²⁷ This notion of American participation in such joint ventures in defense-related spheres raises the question of whether this concept may not be broadened to include other fields. As a catalyst for the promotion of such trilateral enterprises, the highly successful bilateral US-Israel funds for industrial and agricultural research and development (BIRD and BARD) may be useful models to emulate. These business-to-business funds have proven their effectiveness, clearly justifying the initial finance allocated them. Thus, the BIRD fund established in 1979 with a budget of \$75 million from each participant has generated \$2 billion of business in the US itself. The tax revenues alone on this volume of business have easily repaid the initial allocation. Likewise the BARD fund has generated about 600 projects. Israeli R&D in one poultry feeding enterprise has brought \$200 million savings annually in the US.²⁸ There seems little to suggest that expanding the scope of similar funds to include India would not yield even more impressive results.

Conclusion

The major thrust of this paper has been to detail the political rationale for the establishment of a long-term strategic partnership between Israel and India, and for active US endorsement of, and participation in, such a partnership. The core claim has been to argue that given the required political will and political wisdom, a coalition of the most powerful democracy, the most populous democracy and the most beleaguered one could, indeed should, be established to form the nucleus of a global “democratic consortium” of nations, not only dedicated to the principles of liberty and pluralism in regions where such values are under continual siege, but also dedicated to resist those who would supplant them with values inimical to everything enlightened liberalism stands for.

In his address to the Asia Society in New York in October 1998, Premier Vajpayee made the following observation:

The challenge before the world is: how can the worst features of this century be held in check, reversed and their non-recurrence ensured? The challenge also is: how can we better the best features of the twentieth century for all sections of humanity...?²⁹

If, as America, India and Israel believe, democracy is indeed the harbinger of these preferred features, what better way to ensure their realization and propagation than by a mutually supportive grand alliance committed to the defense and sustenance of the democratic way?

Endnotes

- ¹ See “India, Israel Set \$1 Billion Target for Bilateral Trade by 2000 AD”, <http://www.indianembassy.org/inews/November98/6.htm>.
- ² Gerald Segal, Director of Studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, refers to the parallels (and differences) between India and Israel both of whom he sees as kin democracies “confronting insurgence” today. Gerald Segal, “War and Democracies”, *The Hindu*, June 12, 1999.
- ³ Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, in a speech at the Asia Society, New York, September 28, 1998. The text appears in *Mainstream*, October 17, 1998, pp. 13-17. For quote see. p. 13
- ⁴ Zeev Maoz & Bruce Russett, “Alliances, Contiguity, Wealth and Political Stability: Is the Lack of Conflict among Democracies a Statistical Artifact?” *International Interactions*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1992, pp. 245-267, See pp. 245-6.
- ⁵ Vajpayee, p. 13.
- ⁶ Vajpayee has recognized the importance of “the initiative of non-governmental and non-partisan institutions” in civil society in making the US-India relationship “stronger and stronger”. Vajpayee, p. 17. The same principle should be valid for Indo-Israeli ties.
- ⁷ See for example P.R. Kumaraswamy, *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership*, Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 1998, pp. 10 & 37.
- ⁸ For a survey of India’s wealth of natural resources see, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam with Y.S. Rajan, *India 2020: A Vision*

for the **New Millennium**, New Delhi: Viking, 1998, pp. 89 ff.

⁹ For elaboration on this point, see Martin Sherman, “Diversifying Israel’s Strategic Reliance” **Strategic Assessment**, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Vol. 1(4), 1999, pp. 13-16.

¹⁰ P.R. Kumaraswamy, p. 3.

¹¹ Aharon Klieman and Reuven Pedatzur, **Rearming Israel: Defense Procurement Through the 1990s**, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post, p. 217.

¹² **Globes**, December 14-15, 1997 (Hebrew).

¹³ P.R. Kumaraswamy, p. 38.

¹⁴ **See World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers (WMEAT) -1996**, Washington: US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, pp. 74-5; **World Development Report – 1998/99**, New York: World Bank (published by Oxford University Press), 1999, pp. 190-1.

¹⁵ See note 3.

¹⁶ See “India on bin Laden’s hit list”, December 21, 1998.

<http://www.expressindia.com/ie/daily/19981221/35550404.html>

¹⁷ P.R. Kumaraswamy, p. 8. Amnon Barzilay, **Ha’aretz**, December 9, 1998.

¹⁸ P.R. Kumaraswamy.

¹⁹ **The Times of India**, May 11, 1994.

²⁰ For elaboration of the rationale behind this see Martin Sherman, **Despots, Democrats and the Determinants of International Conflict**, London: Macmillan, 1998; Martin Sherman, “What Brings Peace: Wealth or Democracy?”, **Middle East Quarterly**, 5(3) pp. 13-22, 1998.

²¹ **The Times of India**, June 17, 1999.

²² **The Times of India**, June 6, 1999.

²³ **The Times of India**, June 18, 1999.

²⁴ Zeev Schiff, **Ha’aretz**, August 19, 1999.

²⁵ P.R. Kumaraswamy, pp. 20-1.

²⁶ P.R. Kumaraswamy, p. 15.

²⁷ P.R. Kumaraswamy, pp. 39-40.

²⁸ Personal conversation with Yoram Ettinger former Israeli Minister for Congressional Affairs.

²⁹ Vajpayee, p. 14.