

INDO-ISRAEL RELATIONS AND THE MUMBAI ATTACKS

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India recognized the State of Israel in 1950, just two years after its creation but established formal diplomatic relations in January 1992 under Narasima Rao. This started a new phase in India –Israel relations and after from condemning it as an imperial state for years, India began to regard Israel as a “peace loving country”. India’s anti Israel stance during almost four decades was mainly because India was the founder member of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which supported anti-colonial struggles around the world. India was also interested in countering Pakistan’s influence in the Arab world and to safeguard its oil supplies from the Arab countries. During the cold war era, India and Israel were in different camps as Israel was supported by the US whereas Indian sympathies were with the Soviet Union. However, after the collapse of Soviet Union, India was forced to review its foreign policy. It was perhaps an effort to appease the sole super power in the world that India decided to take a “u turn” on its foreign policy and established diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. The Indians believed that good relations with Israel would soften US towards India.

Israel, which had faced relative isolation across the globe, viewed India as its strategic partner in Asia. Israel also saw major benefits in coming closer to a country with a big Muslim population, the second largest in the world, hoping that it would help dilute the importance of the religious component in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

India and Israel both face external and internal threats and both are engaged in aggressive hostility with their neighbouring states. Both the countries have hegemonic designs for regional dimension. Over the years, the cooperation between India and Israel in the political, economic and defence fields has transformed into a security related strategic alliance based on common threat perception which, according to them is “Islamic fundamentalism” or “militant Islam”.

In this regard, over the years, Indo-Israeli military intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation has become very close. Both countries frequently exchange high level delegations. During past several years, India purchased an estimated \$ 8 billion worth of military equipment from Israel. Whereas its overall defence related purchases from Israel amount to around \$1.5 billion annually. Israel has become India’s second largest defence supplier.

Even prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations, there were instances when the two countries cooperated in the fields of military intelligence and counterterrorism. Israel played an active role in helping the Indian army in crises situations; during the 1962 war with China; 1965 war with Pakistan and more recently during the Kargil conflict of 1999. India on the other hand, helped Israel during the 1967 Middle Eastern conflict by covertly sending military equipment to Israel. According to recent reports, the Indian army is also being trained by Israeli counterterrorism experts to deal with the

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problem of "militancy" and "infiltration" in Jammu and Kashmir. In the aftermath of the Mumbai incident, this deep cooperation between the two countries on counterterrorism is likely to grow.

There appears to be a strategic consensus between India, Israel and the US to weaken Pakistan for different reasons. India considers Pakistan as an obstacle in its plans to extend its hegemony to the neighbouring countries. Pakistan, as a frontline state in the global war on terror has been a victim of terrorism itself and despite making huge sacrifices in terms of human and material loss, repeatedly came under pressure by the US to "do more" to tackle the problem of growing militancy in Afghanistan. The Mumbai attacks have provided India with a golden opportunity to malign and isolate Pakistan.

Israel, on the other hand is uncomfortable with the idea of a nuclear Pakistan. It fears that Pakistan's nuclear program can be seen as a source of strength for the Arab world. Since guaranteeing Israel's national security is a fundamental pillar of American foreign policy, the US is committed to Israel's defence against any potential dangers. In the 1980s, it was strongly suspected that Israel and India were involved in secret discussions to undertake joint operations against the Pakistani nuclear facility in Kahuta.

Following the events in Mumbai, there have been demands from some Indian analysts and the general public that India should also follow Israeli footsteps and retaliate against Pakistan for its involvement in the terrorist attacks allegedly carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba. They argue that just like Israel, India also has a right to defend itself and has a duty to protect its citizens against acts of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Others believe that a direct military strike on Pakistan would be a mistake and India should resort to counter terrorist threat through political and diplomatic measures which must be followed by deniable covert actions.

It is ironic that the Indian government is taking a cue from a country which itself has not been successful in creating stability on its own borders. Israel has, by and large, failed to prevent "Islamic Terrorists" from attacking its territory and creating a secure environment for its citizens. Even after 60 years of military actions against the Palestinians, Israel still lives in an atmosphere of fear. Israel's counterterrorism strategy has been a complete failure which the Israeli government has been trying to hide by brutally using its fire power against innocent Palestinians. Two years ago, Israel marched into Lebanon thinking they would destroy the Hezbollah but ended up retreating in disgrace. It is not in India's interest to emulate Israel counterterrorism strategy as this would pose a serious threat to the stability of the entire South Asian region. Instead of accusing and threatening Pakistan, India should investigate the local support which enabled the attackers to carry out this gruesome act of terrorism. Both India and Pakistan are nuclear states and should understand the repercussions and consequences of war.