Indian Strategic Thinking towards Israel:
A Futuristic Approach

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Abstract

Indian strategic thinking towards Israel is not monolithic. It is diverse and plural. There have been many voices in India towards Zionism and Israel. Questions related to Palestine, Zionism and Israel have been discussed in detail in India since the beginning of the twentieth century. Mahatma Gandhi was against Zionism in general and its methods particularly. Jawaharlal Nehru was also against Zionism but seemed ambiguous on the question of Israel which made him hesitant in engaging the Jewish state. Indian Left has demonstrated a very critical approach towards Zionism and Israel. Hindu nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was sympathetic of the Zionist project and was supportive of the movement to establish a national home for the Jews. Political realists like J. N. Dixit and Brijesh Mishra and conservative strategist like Bharat Karnard in India were in favour of Israel and advocated mutually beneficial bilateral strategic cooperation between both the countries. Contemporary Indian debate on Israel is still polarised though the dominant view is supportive of Israel.

Key Words: Strategic Culture, Strategic Ambiguity, Strategic Partnership, India, Israel, Palestine, Zionism, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Left, Hindu Nationalism, Realism.

INTRODUCTION

India’s Israel policy has evolved in several phases and has witnessed many changes over a period of time. India’s grand strategy towards Israel has determined by both ideational as well as structural factors. Learning from the cultural theory of international relations, grand strategy of nation states has also been explained and analysed from the ideational framework of cultural realism or cultural idealism. Rather than establishing any causal link between grand strategy and its ideational determinants, the article tries to explore the evolution of India’s ideational stance towards Israel, which ranges from strategic opposition and strategic reluctance to strategic partnership.
India’s strategic thought towards Israel is not monolithic and it has many strands. Indian strategic thinking on Israel is diverse and plural. The Idea of Israel was a hotly debated issue in Indian domestic politico-strategic space even before India got Independence from the British Raj and it has continued to be so. Different political parties and their leaders expressed divergent views on Zionism and Israel.

**DISCOURSE ON INDIAN STRATEGIC THINKING**

Discourse on Indian strategic thought is recent but vast and diverse and even contains opposing and conflicting views. It begins with George K. Tanaham’s writing in which he forwarded the proposition that India has produced little formal strategic thinking and planning. K. Subrahmanyam and Jaswant Singh agreed with Tanaham’s line of argument. K. Subrahmanyam emphasised that a strategic thinking deficit exists in India. Discussing about the lack of strategic thinking in India, Jaswant Singh emphasised that India simply abandoned the centrality of ‘strategic culture’ as the first ingredient of vigorous and bold national policies. Reflecting his conservative and ultra-realist strategic thought, Bharat Karnard termed India as a ‘reticent state’. He also lamented that there is an ‘absence of strategic imagination, verve, and ambition’ in India. He further stated that ‘India over-emphasises its soft power’ and ‘little attention has been paid to hard power deficit’. However, many scholars in the politico-strategic community differed with this view and have countered the above proposition suggesting an alternative view stressing that India does have a strategic culture. In his seminal work on Indian strategic culture, Kanti Bajpai claimed that “Indians do indeed think about grand strategy”. Bajpai proposed that Indian strategic thinking can be described in terms of three leading schools named Nehruvianism, Neo-liberalism and Hyper-realism and three minor schools based on Marxism, Hindutva and Gandhianism. Writing on India’s strategic culture Shrikant Paranjpe concluded that ‘Indian’ approach to strategic thinking may appear ‘ambiguous’ in nature to the extent that it does not seek to specify in concrete terms the road map of strategy and tactics...yet there is a utility in the deliberate ambiguity that is in fact core of Indian strategic thinking.

However, the discourse on Indian strategic culture is wide-ranging and universal in its nature and does not include detailed country specific case study. Kanti Bajpai does elaborate briefly and meticulously India’s strategic culture in connection with the United States, China and Pakistan but here also the Indian strategic thinking on Israel is missing. The writings on the evolution of India-Israel relationship and India’s Israel policy have explained the subject systematically in structural and/or ideational way but they are
more or less historical and issue-specific in their nature. These writings do
discuss the prevailing strategic thinking in a given time period that might also
have influenced the decision-making process at that point but does not
specifically reflect the Indian strategic thinking on Israel and Zionism as such.
Much has been written about Mahatma Gandhi’s view regarding Zionism but
that is not reflective of the overall Indian strategic thinking on Israel.

INDIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE AND ISRAEL

How does India and Indians think about Israel? What is India’s perception
and prescription about Israel? Is Indian strategic thinking on Israel
monolithic or is it plural? India has been the only country in the world where
its people have been very cordial to the Jewish community and where there
was no trace of anti-Semitism. However, India’s political elite, academics and
the strategic community differed sharply on the question of Zionism and
Israel. Debate on Zionism and Israel in India has been very diverse, plural
and even contains conflicting political continuum for decades.x

Explaining Indian thinking on Israel, eminent Indian scholar on Israel affairs,
P. R. Kumaraswamy, put forward a proposition that India perceived ‘Jewish
nationalistic aspiration’ through ‘an Islamic prism’.x In his seminal work on
India’s Israel policy Kumaraswamy stated that India’s “unfriendly approach
towards Jewish aspirations was partly because its nationalists viewed the
problem in Palestine through an Islamic prism”.x This proposition does not
seem wholly correct. It is true that in 1921 Gandhi invoked the ‘injunction’
of Jajirat al-Arab (the Islamic land of Arabia) to Palestine and in 1922 Indian
National Congress demanded the liberation of Jajirat al-Arab “from all non-
Muslim control.”x Point of reference for both these statements seems to
support Khilafat movement’s demand to protect the Caliph of Ottoman
Empire in order to advance Hindu-Muslim unity against the British Raj.
Palestine was then a part of the Ottoman Empire.

India is considered here as a unitary actor, however there were multiple actors
(dominant or weak) in India as far as Zionism and Israel is concerned. India
has had not one but many voices towards Zionism and Israel since the
beginning. India was sharply divided on the issue of Zionism and Israel. There
are many prisms in India to view Israel. Indian strategic thought on Israel is
comprised of both pro and anti-Israel leanings.
The Indian perception of Zionism and Israel is very diverse and not reflective of ‘Islamic prism’. ‘Islamic prism’ on Israel is strongly against Zionism and the Jewish state. Reflecting the ‘Islamic prism’ both Islamic theology and many Islamic states have been very negative and hostile towards Israel and took the religious line while opposing it. Islamic theology considers Jewish people as Dhimmi and does not provide them equal rights. Islamic Republic of Iran and non-state actors like Hamas and Hizbullah did not even recognise the existence of Israel and were actively engaged against it militarily.

Mahatma Gandhi was against Zionism, but he was also very sympathetic to the Jewish people and even denounced Christian treatment of Jews. Jawaharlal Nehru not only recognised Israel but also wished to engage it. Nehru’s ideological conviction, Arab affinity and domestic sensitivities stopped him from doing so. The Radical Nehruvian and the Indian Left have been very critical towards Israel, but their line of argument is ‘temporal and secular’ rather than religious. The Radical Nehruvian and the Indian Left thinkers are pro-Arab and anti-Israel. However, their argument against Israel was not based on religious logic but on political one. It seems that they looked at Israel from ‘politico-electoral prism’ rather than ‘Islamic prism’. Their pro-Arab and anti-Israel rhetoric seems to be guided by their domestic sensitivities towards the Indian Muslims. In an article P. R. Kumaraswamy also stated that India’s pro-Palestinian position is due partly to the domestic Muslim factor. This ‘domestic Muslim factor’ narrative is reflective of ‘politico-electoral prism’ rather than any ‘Islamic prism’.

Veteran Indian diplomat J. N. Dixit claimed that Congress leader Arjun Singh was against normalisation of India-Israel relations because he was apprehensive of losing Muslim votes. Example of E. Ahamed’s anti-Israel rhetoric given by Kumaraswamy in an article is also indicative of perceiving Israel from the ‘politico-electoral prism’. Kumaraswamy stated that Minister of state for external affairs under the UPA regime, Ahamed of the Indian Union Muslim League, was ‘more vocal in criticising Israel’ and ‘avoided meeting with Israeli officials’. Ahamed’s views towards Israel were emerged ‘partly because of the league’s support base and partly due to his own convictions’. Ahamed has sought to pacify hardliners within his party.

Explaining the rational for CPI(M)’s critical attitude towards Israel, India Today report of 2009 pointed out that it helps the party to consolidate its position with the radicalised Islamist forces in Kerala, where the Marxists are yet a strong political entity. While aligning itself with radical Islamists like Abdul Nasser Madhani, the party specifically targeted Israel becoming India’s
second largest strategic partner. This report is reflective of the notion that CPI(M)’s anti-Israel rhetoric is less governed by ‘Islamic prism’ but more by ‘poli-to-electoral prism’.

Those who seemed to be supportive of the Zionist cause or Israel could not make their opinion public because of their own hesitation or inhibition or not to be seen as going against Mahatma Gandhi’s voice, and not because they were looking at Israel through the ‘Islamic prism’.

Reflecting a kind of politico-strategic pluralism, there exists at least three paradigms in India which portrays Israel in different ways. The Core issues of the debate in these paradigms are centred around the basic assumptions of and prescriptions towards Israel. First paradigm is that of Gandhi-Nehruvianism which is pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian but maintains an anti-Zionist rhetoric along with ‘deliberate ambiguity’ on Israel. The second is that of the Indian Left which is supportive of Palestinian cause and whose doctrinal stand is anti-imperialist, anti-US, anti-Zionist and anti-Israel. The third one is related to political realism and Hindu nationalism, which has pro-Israel leanings and advocates building of strategic partnership between India and Israel. Supporters of each of these paradigms could be found in various circles ranging from politico-academic space to diplomatic circles and strategic community.

GANDHI-NEHRUVIAN PARADigm AND ISRAEL

The Gandhi-Nehruvian paradigm did express sympathy towards Jews but did not support Zionism and Zionist efforts for the establishment of Israel as a national home for the Jewish people.

Much has been written about Mahatma Gandhi and Zionism. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his views categorically about Arab-Jews question in Palestine in his Harijan article in November 1938. Mahatma Gandhi was against Jewish persecution and anti-Semitism and expressed his sympathy towards the Jews. He was also critical of the Christian treatment of the Jews. Gandhi rejected the Zionist endeavour for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. He wrote in his 1938 article that ‘the cry for a national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me’. He stated that ‘the sanction for it is sought in the Bible’, but ‘the Palestine of Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their heart.’ Taking a pro-Palestinian stand, Mahatma Gandhi declared that ‘Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France
He stated that it is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. He advised the Jews ‘to cultivate a spiritual rather than a geographical Zion’. While opposing Zionism, Gandhi gave conditional consent to Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine. He emphasised that “if they must look to the Palestine of geography as their national home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of British gun.” In this regard Gandhi suggested Jews that “they can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs. They should seek to convert the Arab heart.” Mahatma Gandhi’s 1938 public statement towards Zionism served as a model proposition for many in India to support Palestinian cause and oppose Zionism and Israel.

It is claimed by Encyclopaedia Judaica that Gandhi’s Jewish friend Hermann Kallenbach met him in May 1937 in India and ‘succeeded in making the Mahatma more sympathetic to Zionism’. It further stated that Gandhi “permitted Kallenbach to deliver a private statement to the Zionist leadership accepting, in principle, the validity of the Jewish aspiration to found a home in Palestine....however, constrained by his solidarity with Muslim feelings in India, Gandhi never gave public expression to such private sentiments.”

After World War II, Gandhi again expressed some sympathy for the Zionist case in private conversations with the Anglo-Jewish Sidny Silverman and with his American Jewish biographer, Louis Fischer. In an interview with American journalist Louis Fischer in 1946, Gandhi accepted that the Jews had a ‘prior claim’ on the land of Zion. In May 1947, Gandhi again agreed in an interview with Don Campbell of Reuters that Jews had a ‘proper case’.

But when publicity was given to Gandhi’s positive sentiments towards Zionist case, he reiterated his reservations and condemned violence. Clarifying his position and expressing his reservations on the Zionist methods Gandhi stated that the Jews “have erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves with the aid of America and Britain and now with the aid of naked terrorism.”

Gandhi’s view towards Zionism did not seem static and had evolved with the passing of time. Gandhi’s change of heart was very important for the Zionist dream. Gandhi’s post-war views regarding Zionist cause were least known and least popularised in India and abroad. Thus, Gandhi’s pre-war position on Jewish claim on Palestine was different than that of his post-war position. Gandhi’s 1938 statement was pro-Arab and anti-Zionist. But in his post war statements, Gandhi seemed to be supportive of the Zionist case for national
homeland for the Jewish people in principle but expressed his reservation on Zionist methods.

Mahatma Gandhi’s views on the emergence of State of Israel as such are a matter of inferences and speculations because he died in January 1948 and Israel emerged in May 1948. It is quite possible that while being against Zionist methods, Gandhi could have accepted State of Israel as an entity. Speculating Gandhi’s view regarding emergence of Israel, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy claimed that “Mahatma Gandhi was at first against the idea of Israel because at the time he was against the idea of any partition in principle...but by the time Israel became a state, Gandhi was dead. I think that had he been alive, he would have been in support of the state. He was always sympathetic to Jewish culture and people.”

Exploring the roots of anti-Zionist rhetoric of Mahatma Gandhi, Encyclopaedia Judaica stated that Gandhi’s formative perception of Judaism derived from the particular circumstances of his exposure, as a Hindu, to Christian influence. Gandhi perceived Judaism ‘through Christian tinted glasses’. Gandhi’s ‘distorted view of Judaism also prejudiced his perception of Zionism’. It further argued that Gandhi’s passionate effort for ‘Hindu-Muslim amity in an undivided India influenced him to support the Muslim-Arab case against that of Zionism’.

Paul Power enumerates four factors, which influenced Gandhi’s views towards Zionism. Firstly, Gandhi was sensitive towards the ideas of Indian Muslims who were anti-Zionist. Secondly, Zionist methods were inconsistent with his principle of non-violence. Thirdly, Zionism was contrary to Gandhi’s conception of pluralistic nationalism. Fourthly, it would have been imprudent for Gandhi to complicate relations with British who held the mandate to administer Palestine.

Gandhian legacy did influence India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who also supported Palestinian cause and opposed Zionist effort for Jewish statehood. Though Nehru was sympathetic to Jewish persecution and was aware of the Jewish roots in Palestine, he did not support Balfour Declaration of 1917, on the ground that the country was not empty and uninhabited and it was already somebody else's home. He also, declared that we must remember that Palestine is essentially an Arab country, and must remain so. Nehru was hopeful that Jewish-Arab question in mandated Palestine could be resolved through dialogue between the two people.
Nehru was against partition plan of Palestine and rather suggested a federal structure of Arab and Jewish people. Albert Einstein wrote a letter on June 13, 1947 to Nehru to get his support for partition plan of Palestine. Einstein’s argument could not convince Nehru. In his reply to Einstein on July 11, Nehru did express ‘a very great deal of sympathy for the Jews’ and also recognised that fact that ‘the Jews have done a wonderful piece of work in Palestine and have raised the standards of the people there’ but deplored that ‘why have they (Jews) failed to gain the goodwill of Arabs?’ Rejecting the Zionist case, Nehru argued in this letter that national leaders had to pursue ‘policies’ that were essentially ‘selfish policies’ and ‘each country thinks of its own interests first’. xl Thus for Nehru it was in India’s national interest to oppose Zionism, reject partition of Palestine and support Arab world and Palestine. The Nehruvian opposition to Zionism and the Zionist effort for establishing Jewish Homeland in mandated Palestine could be searched in his opposition to imperialism, affinity to Arab nationalism and in his desire not to offend Arab states.

Nehru did not recognise Israel immediately after independence in 1948 but two years later in 1950. Explaining India’s delay in recognising Israel, Nehru stated in 1950 that “we would have recognised Israel long ago because Israel is a fact. We refrained because of our desire not to offend the sentiments of our friends in the Arab countries.” x xl

As far as the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel is concerned, Nehru neither denied it nor proceeded further in that direction. It was argued by Michael Brecher, a biographer of Nehru, that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad sabotaged Nehru’s plan to normalise relations with Israel in early 1952. xl Explaining Nehru’s delay in postponing the establishment of a full diplomatic relation with Israel, its first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion stated in 1958 in Israeli Knesset that “it may be assumed that Nehru has his own reasons for this attitude...but it is clear that these are connected with tactics, not principles and...they are only temporary.” x xl

Thus, the Nehruvian paradigm towards Jewish people, Zionism, national home for the Jews and Israel was not consistent. Nehru was against Zionism and independent sovereign National home for Jews but his views towards Israel were ambivalent and evolved with the passage of time. Nehru was also aware of the strategic benefit of Israel for India and even appreciated Israel for its developmental path. He maintained the posture of strategic ambiguity, politico-strategic hesitation and critical rhetoric towards Israel. Despite recognising Israel as an entity in 1950, opening of India-Israel trade, giving
permission to the Indian Jews to immigrate to Israel and opening of the Israeli consulate in Bombay, Nehru’s politico-strategic hesitation towards Israel did not allow him to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. He was openly perused pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian stance and did not want to antagonise Arab states. Nehru preferred Arabs over Israel. Israel was a dependent variable in Nehruvian thought. Nehru criticised Israel during Suez crisis in 1956 but requested Israel for military help in 1962 Sino-India war.

The Gandhi-Nehruvian paradigm seems to have evolved in a certain pattern. It was anti-Zionist in its early phases but became open ended towards Israel in a later phase. But during post-Nehru period, this paradigm was invoked and explained by many within Congress party in a more conservative way and has been used as an ideational instrument against Israel.

The Congress party as a whole has followed the conservative explanation of Gandhi-Nehruvian thinking on Israel even though there were a few dissent voices within the party. The dominant voice within the Congress party has been pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Israel or maintaining deliberate ambiguity towards Israel.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s politico-strategic approach towards Israel was mixed and reflective of duality. She was openly pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian and even condemned Israel’s policy towards the Palestinians. Explaining her pro-Arab stand, Indira Gandhi stated to an international Jewish leader Isi Leibler that “I am under enormous pressure. It is not only Pakistan...local Muslim minority is becoming a major problem.” Expressing her grudges to Jewish press reporters, Indira Gandhi raised the question, “why the American Jewish dominated press hates me.” On the other hand, she did not succumb to pressures to snap relations with Israel. Mrs Gandhi disclosed in this regard that there was ‘very strong pressure’ from Arab diplomats and rulers during their visit to India to ‘close down the Bombay Israeli consulate’ and ‘to break all relations with Israel’. She categorically admitted that ‘I have resisted’ such demands.

On the contrary, she allowed covert India-Israel engagement in intelligence and military areas. When Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was founded in India in 1968, she not only instructed its head R. N. Koa to imitate the work culture of the Mossad but also entrusted him to establish close cooperation between the RAW and the Mossad. In all likelihood, she would have also approved her principal secretary P. N. Haksar’s move to seek military help from then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir during the 1971 war with
Pakistan. It is also claimed that Indira Gandhi had initially permitted an Israeli strike on the Pakistani uranium enrichment centrifuge complex in Kahuta in 1982, with Indian help but finally called off the raid for unknown reasons.

Thus, Indira Gandhi’s strategic thinking towards Israel was a combination of Nehruvian and realist paradigm. She was a hardcore Nehruvian as she stressed on non-alignment, third worldism, Arab affinity and anti-Israel rhetoric. She was also an ultra-realist as she recognised the importance of power politics, unambiguous stance regarding the use of force and strategic value of Israel. Indira Gandhi’s strategic perspective was termed as ‘militant Nehruvian’ by Stephen P. Cohen.

It is important to note here that Indira Gandhi’s principal secretary P. N. Haksar was sympathetic towards Palestinians and his views towards Israel was negative but he considered Israeli military help necessary for India at the time of crisis. It seems that Haksar might have shaped and influenced Indira Gandhi’s perspective towards Israel. Haksar was termed as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s ‘alter ego’. Senior Congress leader and biographer of P. N. Haksar, Jairam Ramesh, stated that Haksar “emerged as Indira Gandhi’s ideological compass and moral beacon from 1967 to 1973.” That is why Jairam Ramesh termed Indira Gandhi and P. N. Haksar as ‘intertwined lives’. Haksar was also termed as ‘a communist-turned-democratic socialist by conviction’.

According to Ramesh, “Haksar was deeply mindful of what he believed to be grave injustice done to Palestinian people.” Ramesh also noted that Haksar “had also advised Indira Gandhi that he was not in favour of Parliament paying homage to Levi Eshkol, the Israeli Prime Minister who had passed away on 26 February 1969.” For Haskar, “such homage...would needlessly antagonise India’s Arab allies and that Eshkol had done nothing extraordinary to deserve such a tribute.” On the other hand, Haksar was very quick to reach out to his old Israeli friend Shlomo Zabludowick for military supplies during the 1971 war with Pakistan, 1962 war with China and 1965 war with Pakistan. Polish Jew Shlomo Zabludowick was in an armament business through his company establishments Salgad. Ramesh stated that “Military supplies from Israel were to be justified in Hakasr’s mind on grounds of supreme national interests.”

Noted historian and biographer of Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarvepalli Gopal, visited Israel in the first week of July 1973 just three months before the Yom Kippur
War. He assured Shimoni, ‘the Mr. Asia of the foreign office’, that ‘Israel shouldn’t worry about improving official relations’ with India. He also suggested the use of back door channels and track II diplomacy for better relations between the two countries. In this regard he stated that “they (Israel) should send some non-European Jews to India, not to be associated with right-wing Indian parties, and improve Israel’s image in India.” He also suggested that “Israel should invite journalists like Verghese, Mulgaonkar, Kuldip Nayar, G. K. Reddy, Dilip Mukherjee, and non-officials close to the Prime Minister like Pupul Jaykar and Shanta Gandhi.” Describing Israel’s image in India at that time he stated that “it was bad”. In this regard he stated that “Israel was regarded as a theocratic state, consorting with right-wing parties, regarding herself as a European element located in Asia.” Gopal deplored that “nothing can explain away the fact that Israel with an Asian population of 60 percent had a ruling class which was 98 percent European.”

While presenting the liberal face of the Nehruvian paradigm, Gopal’s thinking towards Israel was critical but suggestive of an opening to engage it though he made it clear to his host along with others that “there is no chance of any change in policy in the near future.”

Congress leader P. V. Narsimha Rao as the Prime Minister rectified the Nehruvian paradigm not only in the economic sphere but also in foreign policy matters. Rao was not hesitant towards Israel and decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992. Rao seemed to be a realist rather than a Nehruvian. He seemed to be more inclined towards political realism. Congress veteran Natwar Singh suggested an even-handed approach towards Israel-Palestine and stated during NDA I regime that ‘India should maintain good relations with Israel but not at the expense of India’s relations with the Palestinian people’.

Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar represents the radical face of the Gandhi-Nehruvian paradigm. Aiyar is a radical Nehruvian as he represents the die-hard anti-Israel lobby in the Congress party. Expressing his opposition to the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel, Aiyar stated that normalisation of relations before a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict was a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and of previous policy positions.

Opposing Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s policy towards Israel, Mani Shankar Aiyar expressed the view that Jewish state will not exist by mid-century, and that “Palestine will return to the Palestinians.” Aiyar argued that relations with Israel are morally unfeasible, and that the Jewish state was born
in sin and will be dissolved by mid-century. The veteran Congress leader also stressed that New Delhi’s principled stand has now been distorted by viewing Israel through the prism of defence cooperation. He further stated that PM Modi and Sushma Swaraj cowering behind the BRICS position is not an edifying sight and they took convenient cover behind that. In doing so, they forget Nehru. Aiyar suggested that Secular India should not be joining Modi in extending felicitations to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but in expressing our solidarity with Arabs.

The Nehruvian paradigm was opposed in India by many political parties. Leaders of these political parties raised voices in favour of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. From the BJP side Pramod Mahajan spearheaded this demand. He was supported by Yashwant Sinha (Samajwadi Janata Party) while Subramanyam Swamy (Janata Party) and R.K. Karanja (nominated) wanted a more humane approach towards Israel.

**INDIAN LEFT AND ISRAEL**

Indian Left represents the second paradigm that is pro-Palestinian and pro-Arab on the one hand and is very critical of and opposed to Zionism and Israel on the other hand. This prism is very close to Gandhi-Nehruvian prism as far as critical attitude towards Zionism and support to Arab nationalism and Palestine is concerned. While Nehruvian prism was opposed to Zionism and reflected politico-strategic hesitation and ambiguity towards Israel, Indian Left adopted the posture of sharp ideological opposition to both Zionism and Israel.

The Indian Left derived its ideological inspiration from Marxism-Leninism. The ideology of Marxism and Leninism was critically opposed to the idea of Zionism. The roots of anti-Zionist thoughts in Marxist tradition could be found in the writings of Karl Marx himself, and especially in his “Materialistic analysis of the Jewish Problem”. It is in this ideological background that the Communist movement in Tsarist Russia confronted with the Zionist ideology and movement. As early as 1903, communist leader Lenin wrote in the party’s central organ, *Iskra* (the spark), that the very idea of Jewish nationality was ‘manifestly reactionary’, and ‘in conflict with the interest of the Jewish proletariat’. Ten years later, Stalin reasserted the same view in the pamphlet *Marxism and the National Question*. In it, Stalin strongly rejected the status of nationhood to the Jews since they lacked certain elements of his formula: ‘a nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory,
economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture’.xl

The Indian Left Paradigm explained Zionism and Israel through the ideological lens of Marxism and Leninism. It not only opposed the ‘forcible establishment’ of the State of Israel in 1948 but also strongly supported the cause of the Palestinian people.xl According to this perspective, as per the UN partition plan ‘Israel was allocated 56 percent of the Palestinian land in 1947’ but ‘Zionists actually occupied 78 percent of the land’ after first Arab-Israel War and finally ‘Zionist state waged a war in 1967 and ‘entire territory of Palestine was occupied.’xl The CPI’s official statement accused Israel of being “responsible for state terrorism, violence and aggression.”xl CPI (M) supports the creation of an independent State of Palestine and seeks complete withdrawal of IDF and dismantlement of all Israeli settlement from the territories of West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.xl

Commenting on the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992, CPI’s National Council secretary ‘described the decision as a step in haste’.xl Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) has been critical of BJP for not supporting Yasser Arafat during the second Intifada and also for not condemning his confinement to his Ramallah house in the early 2000.xl The CPI (M) not only opposed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s visit to India in September 2003 but also criticised Atal Behari led NDA regime for inviting a ‘war criminal’.xl CPI (M) has categorically opposed India’s strategic partnership with Israel because Israel ‘is grossly violating the rights of Palestinian people and its Arab neighbours.’xl

The Indian Left is also critical of bourgeoning India-Israel defence ties. For them India is not only abandoning its traditional support for the Palestinian cause but also jeopardizing its warm ties with Arab states and Iran. CPI General Secretary D. Raja stated that “it is a matter of concern that India and Israel are deepening their military relationship”.xl CPI-M leader Sitaram Yechury urged the Modi regime that India should not fund Israel’s war on Palestinians by buying weapons from them. He categorically stated that unfortunately India has been financing Israel’s inhuman war on Palestine by being the largest purchaser of Israeli weapons in the world. That is why he urged the government, “if not stop, then at least, it can suspend the purchase of weapons to express our solidarity with Palestine”.xl

Responding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Israel, CPI-M stated in its press statement that it “marks a rupture in the long-held position of
India which has viewed Israel as an occupying power of Palestinian territories.” The CPI (ML) termed PM Modi’s visit to Israel as ‘a betrayal of democratic principles’ and deplored that “there was no mention during Modi-Netanyahu talks of a two state solution, of the UN resolutions on Palestine, of Palestine right to exist.” During its 22nd Congress, CPI (M) noted in its resolution on Palestine that India-Israel relations under the Modi regime ‘have grown even closer’ because of ‘the ideological affinity between ideologies of contemporary Zionism and Hindutva.’ The CPI-M also denounced India's decision to abstain against Israel in a UN Human Rights Council vote as a sign of its "pro-US and pro-Israeli shift". During the Gaza crisis of 2014, the CPI (M) deplored that Modi’s regime not only ‘adopted a dubious stand which condones the unjustified Israeli aggression’ but also tried ‘to gloss over Israel’s aggression and occupation of Palestine.’

It is important to note that CPI (M) leader Somnath Chatterjee and then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, visited Israel along with large business delegations for seeking investments in West Bengal. Sitaram Yechury also visited Israel but engaged only with the Israeli left parties. These visits were not only reflective of recognition of the State of Israel and its existence as an entity by the Indian Left but also gave the message that Israel is not a taboo for a traditionally anti-Israeli political party which is even willing to enhance economic cooperation under para diplomacy. However, CPI (M) rectified its revisionist approach towards Israel and soon it again adopted the anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian stance. According to Nicolas, Second Intifada limited the effect of initial rapprochement of Indian left with Israel.

It is noticeable that the Soviet Union’s doctrinal stand was anti-Zionist as per its declared Marxist-Leninist ideology. However, the Soviet state played an important role in the emergence of Israel in 1948 inside and outside the United Nations. The first Prime Minister of State of Israel David Ben Gurion said that it was the Soviet Union that saved Israel from physical annihilation. However, the Indian Left, which followed the Marxist-Leninist ideology, did not learn from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was the first country to recognise Israel de jure. The Indian Left could have learnt from the Soviet Union’s doctrinal stand against Zionism and its earlier diplomatic support towards Israel.

The Indian Left’s perspective was also criticised from the point of view of its appeasement policy. Aravindan Neelakandan, co-author of Breaking India, argued that the advantageous strides that China has made over India with respect to relations with Israel owes much to the left wing Nehruvian political
ecosystem in India. Every time the issue of India-Israel relations comes up, the left wing, particularly the CPI-M raises a hysterical pro-Palestinian protest voice and threatens to tar any overt Indian gesture as anti-Muslim.

Neelakandan further argued that on the issue of Israel, CPI(M) advices only to motherland India and never to the only fatherland China. He argued that CPI(M) will create hurdles in India-Israel relations by creating a bad public perception and inciting Islamists by insinuating India as being complicit in the alleged atrocities of Israel. At the same time, it will remain perfectly silent on China, about its own relations with Israel, though the party enjoys with China ideological relations and frequent visits.

HINDU NATIONALISM, POLITICAL REALISM AND ISRAEL

Contrary to the Gandhi-Nehruvian prism and the Left perception, the realist and Hindu nationalist paradigm fully supported Zionism and Israel on various grounds. The Hindu nationalists viewed Zionism positively. Many Hindu prominent figures including Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Sita Ram Goel, Arun Shourie have explicitly condemned anti-Semitism and endorsed the formation of Israel. The Hindu nationalist intellectual Vinayak Damodar Savarkar presented an alternative view regarding Zionism and Israel. He supported Zionism and Zionist effort for the establishment of Israel. He stated that historically speaking, “the whole of Palestine has been, from at least 2,000 years before the birth of the Muslim prophet, the national home of the Jewish people.”

Supporting the Zionist case, Savarkar argued that the ‘fatherland and the holy-land of the Arabian Moslems lies in Arabia and not in Palestine’ and that is why ‘the whole of Palestine ought to have been resorted to the Jews’. Savarkar was not convinced with the Nehruvian logic that the partition of Palestine would be against the unity and integrity of Palestine and the opposition to the creation of Jewish state will secure the goodwill of Muslim states.

In his famous book Hindutva (1923), he emphasized his support for the Zionist cause. "If the Zionists’ dreams were realized, if Palestine became a Jewish state, it would gladden us almost as much as our Jewish friends", said Savarkar He was very hopeful towards Zionist effort and categorically stated that “after centuries of sufferings, sacrifices and struggle the Jews will soon recover their national Home in Palestine which has undoubtedly been their Fatherland and Holyland.”
The Hindu nationalist leader proposed that India’s international policy should be based on ‘to break up the power of the Moslem Blocks from Africa to the Malayan Peninsula’. He was convinced that emergence of ‘a strong and independent Jewish state’ would ‘serve to checkmate the aggressive tendencies of Moslem fanaticism in general’. Based on his perception of Zionism and Israel, Savarkar suggested that ‘establishment of independent Jewish state in Palestine’ should be supported ‘on moral as well as political grounds.’

Savarkar emphasised the commonality between Hindu and Jewish people and in this regard, he categorically stated that “the Jewish people bear no political ill-will towards Hindu Dom. The Jewish minority in Hindusthan too had given us no cause to suspect them as we have been compelled to suspect the Moslem minority”.¹

Pro-Israeli political parties and groups raised voices in favour of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel during the Congress Party rule in independent India. Swatantra Party, Jan Sangh and its successor Bhartiya Janta Party supported the case of Israel. The Jan Sangh advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. BJP leader Pramod Mahajan pointed out that even though both China and Pakistan had occupied large parts of Indian territory, yet there were full diplomatic links with them.¹

BJP leader Sushma Swaraj called Israel a ‘reliable partner’ and she supposed to be a strong admirer of late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.¹ Swaraj also served as a chairperson of Indo-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group from 2006-09. Mrs. Swaraj described the Indian Left opposition to India-Israel strategic relationship as an extension of its anti-US stance. Elaborating this she stated that “the Left parties are basically anti-US and therefore, all those countries which are seen as allies of Washington are disliked by them. They do not like whatever America does while we look at things on a case-to-case basis with regard to the United States”.¹

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is supportive of and impressed with developmental progress of Israel. He understands the strategic importance of Israel for India. Israeli journalist Herb Keinon stated that “Modi knows Israel, appreciates its economic success, and is well aware of what it can offer, beyond the traditional realm of diamonds and military hardware.”¹ Modi is well aware of the fact that innovative Israeli technological expertise in various fields could play a vital role in the rise of India. He knows that Israel is a trusted source of technology and it can offer its technological solutions to
India in many areas and can play an instrumental role in the success of his dream projects like Make in India, Digital India, Clean India, Clean Ganga, Smart City, Skill India and New India.

PM Modi is not against Zionism. He is not hesitant to engage Israel. He became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. During his visit to Israel in 2017, PM Modi’s unscheduled and spontaneous visit to the grave of Theodor Herzl at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem is very significant. The homage to the father of political Zionism is reflective of Modi’s support not only for Zionism but also for the land of Zion and Israel. This signifies India’s recognition to Zionism which was earlier negated by Mahatma Gandhi before the emergence of the State of Israel.

BJP leader Subramanian Swamy has been very categorical in support of Israel. Extending his support to realist paradigm, Swamy stated that India, the United States and Israel have special responsibility in countering the global threat posed by the ISIS. He elaborated that India, the United States and Israel have a special responsibility because of our different strengths. India has manpower strength; the United States has weapons strength and Israelis have intelligence strength.

Regarding conflict in Gaza strip between Hamas and Israel, Subramanian Swamy stated that Indian Muslims should support Israel rather than Hamas. According to him this conflict should be seen as a fight between terrorism and a democratic country instead from a religious viewpoint. Swamy further elaborated that “Israel is a democratic country while Hamas is a terrorist organization and it will be in the nation’s interest to support Israel”. In this regard he raised a question that “why should patriotic Muslims of India support Hamas and not Israel when it is not in the nation’s interest.” Swamy also emphasised that India should support Israel at the United Nations. He stressed on forming a mutual assistance pact with the country for helping each other in dealing with terrorism and emphasised that India’s embassy in Israel should be shifted to Jerusalem. Swamy termed India’s decision to oppose the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem as ‘a huge mistake’. He did not recognise Palestine as a state and emphasised that Palestine Authority is not a country but a temporary block made by the United Nations.

The Realist paradigm perceives Israel as strategic and technological assets on various pragmatic considerations based on national interests, national security and national development. Reflecting the paradigm of political realism,
India’s former foreign secretary J. N. Dixit advocated normalisation of India-Israel relations in order to fulfil the ‘legitimate interests of India’. Dixit not only ‘persuaded then Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao to overcome opposition in his own Congress party’ but also ‘singlehandedly dismantle the outdated mode of thinking in South Block’. It was realised that India could learn a lot from Israeli experience in the fields of agriculture, drip irrigation, water conservation, solar energy, border management and other areas of high end technology. Non-reciprocity of Arab-Muslim world to India’s national security concern compelled realists to be vocal regarding India’s Israel policy. Dixit lamented that “what have the Arabs given us, if I may ask? Did they vote for us in the Kashmir issue? Were they supportive of us when we had the East Pakistan crisis?”

India’s National Security Adviser during NDA I, Brajesh Mishra, supported the idea of a strategic axis between the US, Israel and India in a speech delivered at the American Jewish Committee in 2003. He said that these three countries “have been prime targets of terrorism and they have to jointly face the same ugly face of modern-day terrorism.” "Such an alliance", he said, "would have the political will and moral authority to take bold decisions in extreme cases of terrorist provocation.”

Reflecting his conservative strategic ethos, Bharat Karnard suggested that ‘sensible strategic course’ for India is ‘to forge a strong technology-security relationship with Israel’. In the early 2000s, he proposed the ‘idea of quid pro quo’ in defence sector. Explaining his ‘eminently strategic idea’ for mutual benefit, he stated that “India and Israel should mesh their arms industries in mutually beneficial arrangement involving Indian capital for joint advanced weapons R&D in Israel and Israel transferring the production of bulk conventional military systems.” He argued that “such a combination would result in the emergence of one of the most formidable integrated military-industrial complexes in the world.” Bharat goes a step further in suggesting that “India can offer Israel the underground testing facility to fire off its weapons because it simply does have the vacant space for this purpose.”

Thus, the realist thinkers advocate forging close India-Israel cooperation in military and strategic arenas on pragmatic ground. In place of politico-strategic hesitation of the Nehruvian paradigm and the ideological opposition of the Indian Left, the realist supported the building of strategic partnership between India and Israel.
CONCLUSION

Thus, Indian strategic thinking towards Israel is very diverse and plural. Various Indian paradigms towards Israel reflect a particular kind of strategic thinking and perception based on their politico-ideological orientation.

The Gandhi-Nehruvian prism and the Indian Marxist prism adopted pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian stance and criticised Zionism. But there is a slight difference between the Nehruvian paradigm and the Indian Left paradigm as far as Israel is concerned. The Indian Left paradigm is more vocal and critical of Israel than that of Nehruvianism. The liberals in Nehruvian paradigm recognise the strategic benefit of Israel but are hesitant to discuss it openly. Nehru was aware of Israel's developmental achievement but maintained a politico-strategic hesitation and a sort of ‘deliberate ambiguity’ towards it and permitted a low level of engagement with the Jewish state. Both the prisms reflected almost a zero-sum approach towards Arab-Israeli conflict and were based on either-or format. These paradigms not only hyphenated relationship between Palestine and Israel but also perceived Israel as a dependent variable in Arab-Israel zone.

On the other hand, the supporters of Hindu nationalism and political realism expressed favourable attitude towards Israel and advocated the development of friendly relations with Israel. This paradigm believes in de-hyphenating the relations between Palestine and Israel. Israel is treated as an independent variable in Hindu nationalist and realist paradigm. In place of zero-sum approach towards Arab-Israel zone, this duo-paradigm stressed non-zero-sum approach for the same.

Apart from structural compulsions at the system, sub-system and national level, these ideational underpinnings played a very decisive role in shaping and determining India’s foreign policy towards Israel. India’s policy towards Arab-Israel zone was initially guided by the Nehruvian paradigm and resulted in pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian stand with very limited engagement with Israel. Sooner or later, political realism emerged as a dominant voice and supported rectification in India’s Israel policy to the extent of treating it as a strategic partner. With the passage of time, political realism seems to be prevailing over the old policy framework based on the Nehruvian worldview that has been modified recognising Israel as a beneficial strategic partner. As a matter of policy framework, one-sided alignment in West Asian geopolitical configuration has been replaced by multi-engagement strategy in the multipolar region.