

Transformative Shift in India's Israel Policy: 30 Years of Diplomatic Relations

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Abstract:

India has recognized the state of Israel in the year 1950 and followed by no relations but the shift in India's policy towards Israel changed in the year 1992. This paper tries to understand Anti Israel stand of India before and after both nations' independence. What made India delay the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel from 1950 to 1992? In today's scenario what made India trust Israel as a dependable ally. Some answers were been able to find out on India's changing perceptions towards Israel throughout time and today India and Israel's relations are considered to be strong and deeply rooted and this January of 2022 both nations stressed to improve the bilateral relations on the occasion of the completion of 30 years of diplomatic relations and are ready to work together in multilateral forums as well.

Keywords: India, Israel, Palestine, counter-terrorism, foreign policy

Introduction

As we attempt to perceive the relations between India and Israel, a few things are to be observed from the time of inception. This article focuses on India and Israel's bilateral relations with special emphasis on how India moderately altered her policy towards Israel without any change in her stand with the Palestinian cause.

As we tend to see visibly the two states share warm relations in almost every field right from defense to trade, agriculture, Research and Development, space, counter-terrorism, tourism, religion, etc., the relations are considered to be special by both sides. Many scholars consider them and their status to be very similar in many spheres like

1. Being colonized states of Britain and getting independence at a similar time.
2. The partition problem of their respective territories on a religious basis.

3. The wars they fought immediately after the achieving of independence like the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947 and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948.
4. Both the countries encounter the problems of cross-border terrorism and Border issues with neighboring states.
5. They are the democratic states with secularism as a core principle in their constitution. They also were the sufferers of horrible terrorist attacks.

All the above points clearly state that they have many things in common to come together and work together for the welfare of their countries. But the diplomatic relations were not expected to be that way before the year 1992. They also differed in other aspects other than similarities. Many researchers have analyzed those aspects as reasons for the delay in establishing relations till 1992. India before the independence articulated her views and opinions through the Indian National Congress unlike with the British Government in India. [1]

Firstly she was frustrated with British colonialism not just in India but also in other parts of the world. India adopted a pro-Palestinian stand because Israel was seeking British assistance to make a national homeland of their ancestor's territory. At the same time, India was too struggling to attain her independence through INC.

So, therefore, INC was one among to raise concerns and objections over the situations and gave her utmost solidarity to the Palestinians. India even after her independence did not approve the partition of Palestine and rejected the bifurcation plan and the formation of Israel. Being a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) India offered a federal plan which wasn't considered by either of the parties and also lacked a clear structure. [2]

So India became one of the non-Muslim countries to lately recognize the state of Israel but recognized Israel in 1950 two years after Israel's establishment as a state.

The above information is considered to be the phase of two states who are unknown to each other but that doesn't mean there were no Indo-Judaic connections. Those links can be drawn from the history of ancient times itself and the Jews cannot forget that India was always considered to be a safe refugee to the persecuted Hebrews where they never experienced anti-Semitism and have lived their lives with freedom and liberty and have identified themselves as Cochin Jews, Madras Jews, etc.,

The second phase is considered by having no relations irrespective of the fact that India has recognized Israel in 1950 but followed by no relations and many reasons attributed to those conditions. The Suez crisis aggravated and distanced the two states. Further India never showed

interest in the efforts shown by Israelis to establish an Israeli embassy. However, a consulate was been permitted to open in Mumbai but not in the capital city to avoid unnecessary tensions. [3]

It was when India had a conflict with China in 1962; India sought Israel's help to fight the war against china by procuring weapons from them. It was a breaking point where India trusted Israeli-made weapons and showed interest in seeking defense assistance from Israel. Again in 1971, India sought Israel's help to obtain the defense equipment to fight against Pakistan. Irrespective of the defense assistance from Israel, India continued to maintain its stand towards Palestine internally and externally.

But it was at that time that the world political conditions were changing drastically. The cold war was on the verge and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created the vacuum of hegemony and made America occupy the superpower status also the Gulf war crumbled the unity of the Arab states. The talks of mediation in the name of peace deals were going between Israel and Palestine.

The changing world political conditions made India develop her relations with Israel and thus it led to shift her policy towards Israel.

Firstly, India substituted Israel with the Soviet Union for the procurement of arms

Secondly, India always lacked the support of Arab states about the Kashmir problem on various international platforms and even when she openly stood with her Arab friends and gave her accord to the Palestine cause.

Thirdly, and also economic reforms introduced by India made India adjust the policy of liberalization.

Lastly, because India never had a face-to-face conflict she should not pursue diplomatic relations with Israel.

So thus after four decades, India finally opened up diplomatic relations with Israel under the premiership of P. V. Narasimha Rao. Ever since the commencement of the diplomatic relations, the ties became unstoppable except during sometimes under the congress regime by not changing their position towards the Palestinian cause and on the other side purchasing, collaborating became the common feature of India's Israel policy. However, under Bharatiya Janata Party the relations flourished and lots of activities were engaged by both sides and relations became multi-dimensional but not ignoring Congress government which took the first initiative to unveil the diplomatic relations in 1992.

From thenceforth diplomatic relations were initiated in many angles of bilateral relations worth mentioning were Defense, Agriculture, Water, Space, Science and Technology and many more.

This paper has focused on the emerging areas of cooperation where defense cooperation stands in priority as after the disintegration of the Soviet Union India's major challenge was initially the up-gradation of defense equipment and later resulted in the transfer of arms and a lot of collaboration is witnessed in resulting by now with the joint ventures [4]. Israel was ever willing to sort out the defense difficulties of India and cooperated with the supply of weapons in a flexible time.

Agriculture and Water Management too was explored by both parties as it helped the Indian agriculture sector taking the bilateral cooperation which engaged the state governments of India in boosting the respective sector in taking the aid of Israeli Agricultural technology in drip irrigation, soil treatment, harvesting management and the setting up of Indo-Israel action plan which resulted by now more than 28 centers of excellence in the states of India developing the quality of fruits and vegetables with and adoption water technologies by recycling and water treatment which is quite useful for the Indian farmers[5]. The space ties also helped India to increase her existing technology in wake of the Mumbai attack with the help of the RISAT 2 satellite to trace the targets in unconditional weather as such. Coming to the cultural sphere both countries admire each other's culture and tradition and adopt each other's practices such as the celebration of International Yoga day every year in Israel.

Conclusion

The domestic and international factors imposed India to pursue a shift in India's Israel policy. Irrespective of any party in power post-1992 of normalization of relations have engaged Israel concerning uphold the bilateral cooperation but have always kept the traditional promise of supporting the Palestine cause. It is very evident that relations became rapid and vigorous under the regime of Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu and the change of voting pattern in the international platform also makes the states for a strong bilateral relationship. Irrespective of the changes of governments in Israel from last three years, Israel was always keen to keep its promise to India as a dependable partner and continue her association with India in all the sectors whether it was Defense, Space, Agriculture, Trade, Science & Technology, and both nations have commemorated the 30 years of Diplomatic relations on 30th January 2022. To conclude, in the discipline of international relations every nation state's priority is her national interest and pursue their foreign policy based on their self-interest and for the welfare and progress of their respective states.

Thus, India shifted her foreign policy towards Israel replacing the idealistic approach with a realistic approach in pursuing her relations by balancing both Israel and Arab states and pursuing a pragmatic and realistic foreign policy in the Middle Eastern region.

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