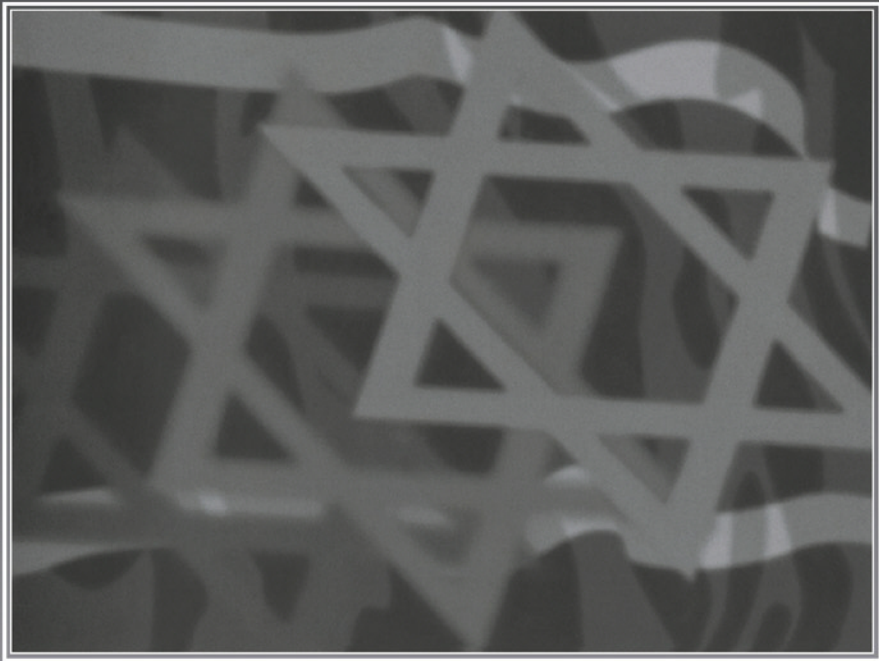


**ISRAEL'S
QUEST FOR RECOGNITION
AND ACCEPTANCE IN ASIA**

GARRISON STATE DIPLOMACY



JACOB ABADI

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ISRAEL'S QUEST FOR RECOGNITION AND
ACCEPTANCE IN ASIA

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Israel's Quest for Recognition and Acceptance in Asia

Garrison State Diplomacy

JACOB ABADI

United States Air Force Academy



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LONDON • PORTLAND, OR

First published in 2004 in Great Britain by
FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS
Crown House, 47 Chase Side, Southgate
London N14 5BP

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or
Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to
www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

and in the United States of America by
FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS
c/o International Specialized Book Services, Inc.,
920 NE 58th Avenue, Suite 300
Portland, Oregon, 97213-3786
Website: www.frankcass.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Abadi, Jacob

Israel's quest for recognition and acceptance in Asia:
garrison state diplomacy.—(Cass series. Israeli history,
politics and society; no. 34)

1. National security—Israel 2. Israel—Foreign relations—
Asia 3. Asia—Foreign relations—Israel 4. Israel—Foreign
relations—Asia—Case studies 5. Asia—Foreign relations
—Israel—Case studies

I. Title
327.5'69405

ISBN 0-203-50414-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-58250-0 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-7146-5576-7 (Print Edition) (cloth)
ISBN 0-7146-8564-X (paper)
ISSN 1368-4795

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Abadi, Jacob.

Israel's quest for recognition and acceptance in Asia: garrison state and diplomacy/ Jacob Abadi.
p. cm.—(Cass series—Israeli history, politics, and society; 34)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7146-5576-7 (cloth)

1. Israel—Foreign relations—Asia. 2. Asia—Foreign relations—Israel. 3. Israel—
Foreign relations—East Asia. 4. East Asia—Foreign relations—Israel. 5. Israel—Foreign
relations—South Asia. 6. South Asia—Foreign relations—Israel. 7. Israel—Foreign
relations—Asia, Southern. 8. Asia, Southern—Foreign relations—Israel.

I. Title. II. Series.
DS119.8.A78A23 2003
327.5694—dc22
2003059614

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Abbreviations

<i>ADNB</i>	<i>Ankara Daily News Bulletin</i>
AFP	Agence France Presse
AIPAC	American-Israel Public Affairs Committee
APF	Azerbaijan Popular Front
APP	Associated Press of Pakistan
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control Systems
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCARs	Commonwealth of Central Asian Republics
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
ECO	Economic Corporation Organization
ECOSSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
<i>EOI</i>	<i>The Echo of Iran</i>
FAM	Foreign Affairs Malaysia
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GRUNK	Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale de Kampuchea
ICO	Islamic Conference Organization
IDF	Israel Defense Force
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
ISA	Israel State Archives
ISF	Islamic Socialist Front (Sri Lanka)
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JUSMAG	Joint US Military Advisory Group
KUNA	Kuwait News Agency
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Land Equal Society Party, Sri Lanka)

MCA	Makayan Chinese Congress
MEED	<i>Middle East Economic Digest</i>
MENA	Middle East News Agency
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front (Philippines)
MSFD	Maritime Self-Defense Force
NAM	Nonaligned Movement
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NTUC	National Trade Union Council
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore)
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia
PDFLP	Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIA	Pakistan International Airlines
PKK	Partiye Karkeran Kurdistan (Workers Party of Kurdistan)
PMIP	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
PN	Parti Negara (National Party, Malaya)
PPP	People's Progressive Party (Singapore)
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRO	Public Records Office (UK)
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (Indian government)
SAVAK	Sazemane Etelaat va Aminate Kechvar (Persian-Iranian Security and Intelligence Organization)
SEATO	South-East Asia Treaty Organization
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UMNO	United Malay's National Organization Party
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNP	United National Party (Sri Lanka)
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
VOA	Voice of America

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era in the history of the Middle East and profoundly affected Israel's foreign relations. A major byproduct of this metamorphosis was a rapid process of rapprochement between Israel and the non-Arab countries of the Asian continent. After more than 40 years of alienation these countries began normalizing their relations with Israel. So dramatic was this change of attitude that many observers were left dumbfounded. In an article in the *New York Times* from June 1993, one writer has noted with astonishment, 'So rapidly are the traditional walls of hostility falling around Israel that it is dizzying to focus on the new world opening around it—from Russia and the open-armed Moslem republics of Central Asia to China and India.'¹ Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir boasted that 'Israel's long period of isolation has come to an end and our erstwhile narrow diplomatic map has expanded dramatically.'² Similar statements were made by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and other Israeli officials.

Israel belongs to a category of countries surrounded by hostile neighbors, or 'garrison states' as they are often called. For most of its existence Israel remained a pariah and an outcast garrison state. This state of affairs compelled the Israeli Foreign Ministry to approach foreign countries in quite a low-profile manner.³ Israel's diplomacy was characterized by such profound distrust of foreign nations that even those which appeared sympathetic to its cause were regarded with suspicion. Similarly, Israeli leaders rejected the United Nations as the ultimate arbiter of world order and a legitimate forum from which they could hope to gain recognition and support. Israeli leaders had often resented UN decisions and even expected to be condemned by its members. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion's famous dictum, 'What matters is not what the Gentiles say, but what the Jews do' reflected the contempt he felt toward the United Nations and his determination to devise other means aimed at providing security to the newly established state. Ben Gurion believed that Israel could hope to find security only by building strong armed forces and forming alliances with countries surrounding the Arab states. His abortive efforts to bind Israel with Ethiopia, Turkey and Iran which culminated in the so-called 'Peripheral Alliance' was part of an overall scheme to bypass the Arab states. The quest for security and legitimacy led Ben Gurion and his successors to seek rapprochement not only with the countries surrounding the Arab states but also with the more distant countries in the Asian continent. However, an analysis of Israel's foreign policy reveals that despite frequent allusions to its importance to Israel's security, Asia remained marginal on the national agenda, while Israeli Foreign Ministry officials demonstrated a clear tendency to give priority to their country's relations with the United States and Western Europe. Asian countries were just as indifferent to Israel and Middle Eastern issues never loomed large on their national agendas. In an article written five years after the establishment of Israel, Walter Eytan, who served as the first Director of

the Israeli Foreign Ministry said, 'Oddly enough, the countries of Asia do not appear to take a very keen interest in the Middle East as such.'⁴ Yet when they did show interest in Middle Eastern affairs their policy was clearly sympathetic to the Arab cause. With the exception of Turkey, Iran, Japan, Burma and the Philippines, most Asian countries maintained their distance from Israel and the prospects of improving relations were remote in the early days of Israel's existence. By the early 1950s, there was a growing sense of pessimism in the Israeli Foreign Ministry regarding the prospect of better relations with the Asian countries. On 15 June 1953, Israel's Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett told the members of the Knesset:

When we arrived to our homeland in this corner of western Asia we did not relinquish the cultural treasures which we acquired in the countries of the West. Yet, we did not come as strangers and invading westerners but as citizens of the East returning to their homeland... So far, we are encountering walls of alienation, misunderstanding, suspicion and even hostility in this continent. There is a mental and historical abyss which we will not be able to bridge easily.⁵

Particularly distressing for Israeli Foreign Ministry officials was the fact that the Asian countries deliberately excluded Israel from participation in conferences dealing with Asian and African affairs.⁶ Undoubtedly, the attitude of the Asian countries had a discouraging effect on the efforts exerted by Israeli diplomats. Consequently, Asia continued to remain marginal on the Foreign Ministry's agenda. Given the fact that Israel's main objective in the military campaigns against Egypt in 1956, and again in the Six Day War of 1967, was to eliminate the naval blockade of the Straits of Tiran in order to keep the sea-lanes with Asia open, this neglect seems quite surprising.

That Asia remained marginal on the agenda of the Israeli Foreign Ministry was in large measure due to the fact that the country's founding fathers aspired to model their country after Europe. For the founders of the Zionist movement and the architects of the Jewish state, it was Europe, not Asia that provided a model and an inspiration. Regarding themselves as European they naturally did not develop an affinity with the East. In his book *The Jewish State*, the founder of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl writes: 'Palestine is our unforgettable historical homeland...could be a part of a wall protecting Europe against Asia, we could provide the vanguard of culture against barbarism.'⁷ Similarly, Chaim Weizmann, the prominent leader of Labor Zionism appealed to Great Britain to facilitate the development of a Jewish community in Palestine so that the Jews could develop the country and introduce European civilization to it.⁸ This conviction was even more pronounced in the right-wing camp of Zionism. Vladimir Jabotinsky, leader of the revisionist wing of the Zionist movement, had written in a similar vein saying, 'The spiritual atmosphere of Europe is ours...and in Palestine this creativity will continue. As Nordau has put it so well, we come to the Land of Israel in order to push the moral frontiers of Europe.'⁹

This tendency to look westward was in large measure responsible for the distance between Israel and the Asian countries. The pro-Western tendency in Israel's foreign policy persisted, leaving Israel on the margins of a huge continent, without becoming

really involved in the events there. Nevertheless, aspiring to gain legitimacy and recognition in the international community, successive Israeli governments were compelled to adopt a pragmatic approach and to seek rapprochement with the Asian countries. Moreover, the Arab-Israeli conflict made it imperative that Israel gain Asia's diplomatic support in the United Nations. Thus in 1956, Foreign Minister Golda Meir said that Israel regarded itself as an integral part of the Asian continent and that it would naturally strive to find a place among the Asian nations.¹⁰ Successive Israeli governments have often repeated such statements. However, the barriers seemed insurmountable and there was little in common between Israel and the Asian countries. Only a few Israeli left-wing Labor politicians such as Ben Gurion and Yigal Allon became interested in Buddhism and Asian culture, and of all political parties, only the left-of-center Achdut Ha'avodah and the Marxist Mapam parties demonstrated a keen interest in Asia.

As for the Asian countries, they remained unfamiliar with Jewish history and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Their unfamiliarity with the Bible and the Jewish spiritual and religious contribution to mankind kept them distant and they saw no reason to welcome the newly established Jewish state. Moreover, the conspiratorial theory equating Zionism with imperialism found easy acceptance in Asian countries. Reinforced by years of colonial rule and anti-Jewish propaganda, the notion that Zionism was a tool used by the Western powers to extend their colonial rule in the Third World found many adherents in Asian countries, making Israel's acceptance in that region far more difficult.

During most of the first decade of its existence Israel's diplomacy was aimed at gaining diplomatic recognition from India and China. Foreign Ministry officials hoped that such recognition would open the door to Israel's acceptance in Asia. There was much talk in those days about Israel's role as a bridge between the countries of Europe and the Third World. Immediately after independence, Israel's target was to bypass the hostile Arab states by establishing diplomatic relations with the nations of Asia and thereby combat the political and economic boycott imposed by the Arab world. Israel's predicament as a country surrounded by enemies made it imperative that such foreign policy be pursued with some vigor even with the Muslim countries in Asia. While it was clear from the outset that Pakistan was hopelessly committed to the Arab cause, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials hoped for success in Indonesia and Malaysia.

One of the main objectives of Israel's foreign policy in the early years of its existence was to escape the blame that Zionism was an offshoot of colonialism and that Great Britain was responsible for the birth of a state which constituted a foreign implant in the heart of the Arab Middle East. Consequently, Israel's major objective during the years 1948-50 was to pursue a nonaligned and independent foreign policy. Israel hoped to show solidarity with the Asian nations and thereby gain recognition. Israeli leaders had earnestly hoped that the socialist ideology that they adopted would provide a common ground for understanding with Asia's socialist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu. Spearheading the attempt to reach Asia through this common ideology were Mapai (Israel's Labor Party) and its powerful agency the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor). Representatives of these bodies had often attended meetings such as the Socialist Convention held in Rangoon in 1953.

Israel's failure to gain acceptance in Asia in those early years was due not only to hesitation by countries such as India, whose government feared Muslim reaction and

therefore did not recognize Israel until the end of 1950, but also to its own omissions. Primarily, Israel's insistence on 'reciprocity' in the bilateral relations proved to be a major stumbling block in the normalization process. Thus for example, when India agreed to discuss the possibility of opening an Israeli representation office in New Delhi, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett was convinced that Israel should demand that India open a similar office in Jerusalem. Nehru's hesitation was no inspiration to the rest of the Asian countries, which adopted similar delaying tactics. In the first two years of its existence only four countries, India, Burma, Thailand and the Philippines extended recognition to Israel. Another group including Japan, Laos, Cambodia and Singapore established diplomatic relations with Israel shortly afterwards. Nepal, Ceylon and South Korea joined them by the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Countries such as China, India and Vietnam did not follow suit until the early 1990s. North Korea, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia have yet to recognize Israel.

One of the main reasons for Israel's failure to appear as a nonaligned nation was its attitude toward the Korean War. After its decision to support the UN military action in Korea, the Israeli government could no longer pretend that its policy was based on the principle of international morality.

One of the main blunders of Israel's foreign policy during the early years was its apparent failure to seize the opportunity to establish relations with China. Israel's policy toward China was a major topic of discussion during the mid-1950s. Some observers continue to claim that Israel missed a rare opportunity when it failed to respond to China's diplomatic attempts to normalize bilateral relations. Those who defended Israel's decision to reject China's overtures argued that US pressure was the cause.¹¹ It is possible, however, that Israel's exclusion from the conference of nonaligned nations which held its meeting at Bandung, Ceylon in 1955 had a strong impact on China's decision to reorient its foreign policy toward the Arab states and away from Israel.

By the mid-1950s, Israel's policy toward Asia seemed to have reached a standstill. With the exception of Burma, most Asian nations showed little interest in Israel. Burma had already established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1953. Its cooperation with Israel intensified in the coming years and U Nu was the first foreign Prime Minister to set foot in Israel. However, even in this isolated case there were unforeseen obstacles. Israeli officials made promises that they were often unable to fulfill. There was lack of trained personnel for the projects which Israel committed itself to carrying out, and some of the Israeli experts made excessive fiscal demands on the Burmese. Some of the planned projects were overly ambitious and were conceived with complete disregard to local conditions in Burma. Transportation problems and differences of language and climate had compounded the difficulties. Yet the value of this experience should not be underestimated. As it turned out, Burma proved to be the workshop for Israel's future activities in Asia.

The Israeli-Egyptian conflict of the mid-1950s had further intensified Asian hostility toward Israel. For many Asian countries, Israel's collusion with Great Britain and France against Egypt during the Suez Affair of 1956 was proof that it belonged to the imperialist camp. The only countries that accepted Israeli diplomatic representatives at that time were Japan, Burma and India and only Japan and Burma had representatives in Israel. Since the Straits of Tiran were under an Egyptian blockade the volume of trade with the

Asian states also remained limited.¹² Nevertheless, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry remained optimistic regarding the prospects of better relations with Asia. Although the Suez Affair triggered a critical response from Asian nations, these proved to be pragmatic enough to realize that the young Israeli state whose swift military campaign against Egypt brought an end to the Egyptian blockade could be relied upon to provide them with technical guidance. Initially, it was Israel's military prowess rather than its agricultural and scientific achievements that helped it earn the admiration of the Asian nations.

Gradually, it became obvious to the small Asian nations that they had much in common with Israel. Countries such as Burma, South Korea, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal, Singapore and Burma all came to realize that their problems were similar to Israel's. Like Israel, they had recently obtained their independence from colonial rule. Not only were they in the process of building their economies but they also had similar security concerns. Israel's stunning victory in the Six Day War reinforced its image as a small but brave country and its ability to make the most out of its meager resources was an object of admiration by most Asian nations. There was little wonder therefore, that by the late 1960s Israel managed to establish ties with more countries. It had representatives in Ceylon, Nepal, the Philippines, Cambodia and South Korea, yet compared to its success in Africa, Israel's achievements in Asia remained limited. This was largely due to the fact that African countries were less populated than those of Asia. Consequently, Israel's contribution in African countries was far more evident. Moreover, Israel began assisting the states of Africa prior to their independence and thereby earned their trust. Israel's acceptance in Africa was easier due to the fact that the rhetoric concerning the Zionist conspiracy with imperialism never gained the popularity that it did in Asia. Moreover, Israel's relations with the African nations were more directly tied to its strategic thinking—the notion that Israel must establish relations with the countries surrounding the Arab states—than was the case with the Asian nations.

Israel's ability to supply weapons to Asian countries was an additional factor in helping it to promote better relations with them. In 1954, Burma was the first to purchase from Israel obsolete Spitfire aircraft and asked that Israeli technicians be sent to introduce them into service. Nepal and Singapore soon followed Burma's example by asking for Israeli assistance in training their armed forces. However, Israel's arms exports proved to be a doubled-edge sword in that while they earned Israel the friendship of one country, this alienated the other. Thus, for example, Israel's sale of mortar shells to India in 1962 caused resentment in Pakistan. Yet neither the Israelis nor the Asian states seemed deterred. Mutual visits by senior officers from both sides became more frequent. These contacts intensified when Israel began providing technical aid, sent experts to Asian countries and sponsored courses and workshops for Asian students.

A major obstacle to rapprochement between Israel and the Asian states was the autocratic nature of their regimes. The most obvious example of this was the fall of U Nu in Burma and the rise of General Ne Win. This change led to an immediate decrease in Israeli influence in Burma, because Israel's friends in Burma were identified with U Nu's regime and therefore his downfall had an immediate impact on Israel's popularity there. Similarly, the rise of a new prime minister in Ceylon and the revolution in Iran led these countries to sever their diplomatic relations with Israel.

By far the most devastating blow to Israel's diplomacy in the early years, however, was the reluctance of the Asian countries to invite Israel to the conference of the nonaligned nations held at Bandung. From Jerusalem's viewpoint this was a clear message that the emerging Third World countries were neither ready nor willing to accept Israel as an Asian country.

Israel's failure to gain recognition and acceptance in Asia was in large measure a byproduct of its foreign policy emphasis on security matters. Israel's security needs dictated reliance on countries capable of providing arms. Therefore, friendship with arms-producing countries such as France and the United States loomed large on Israel's foreign policy agenda while the Asian countries remained marginal. The Sinai Campaign of 1956 underscored Israel's dependence on the arms-producing countries of the West. In January 1957, Ben Gurion stated candidly that as far as Israel's existence and security were concerned, the friendship of European countries was just as important as that of the Asian countries.¹³ Such pragmatic considerations continued to characterize Israel's approach toward the Asian countries. There was little that these poverty-stricken countries could offer to Israel's economy. For most of the years of its existence, Israel's traditional markets were Europe and the United States. The fact that the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran remained closed to Israeli navigation in those years had reduced Asia's importance even further. It is hardly surprising therefore, that Israel's main efforts were directed toward Europe and the United States. Unable to offer Israel the sophisticated weaponry and the massive foreign aid needed for its survival, the Asian countries remained marginal in the eyes of the Israeli government and did not loom large on the Foreign Ministry's agenda. Furthermore, the largest and most powerful Jewish communities lived in Western countries. Israelis from all walks of life felt that they had much more in common with these communities than with the smaller and less affluent ones that lived in Asian countries. Therefore, the Foreign Ministry invested more effort and funds in cultivating relations with the West. All Israel expected from the Asian countries at that time was political and moral support at the United Nations. Yet despite Israel's tendency for self-reliance and the preference it gave to its relations with the West, its leaders did not entirely abandon their diplomatic efforts and the attempts to seek better relations with all countries, regardless of their size and power, continued. Asian and African countries were encouraged to establish diplomatic relations with the young Jewish state that sought to obtain their good will by providing them with technical aid. The Asian countries, however, were not quick to decide on a complete departure from their traditional policy. Deeply ingrained in the Asian mind, the image of Zionism as a tool of imperialism could not easily be erased after years of a verbal anti-Western campaign.

A thorough perusal of the correspondence of Israeli Foreign Ministry officials with Asian diplomats reveals that the former were sympathetic to the dilemma of the Asian countries whose populations were subject to colonial rule until the postwar period. Yet at the same time there was a prevalent sense of disappointment and resentment against them, and their voting pattern in the United Nations was perceived as being pro-Arab. Although the official line of the Asian countries remained anti-Israeli, most Asian diplomats saw benefits in cordial relations with Israel and carefully refrained from hostile comments. Moreover, Israeli diplomats were repeatedly told by their Asian counterparts

that what their representatives said in the United Nations should not be taken seriously and that despite their governments' official stance they had no intention of severing their commercial and cultural contacts with Israel.

Despite frequent disappointments, Israeli decision-makers remained determined to extend their contacts with the countries beyond the hostile Middle East. The conviction held by many Israelis that an alignment with a great power was hardly a guarantee for security persisted despite the fact that Israel's ties with the United States improved considerably after the Six Day War. For those Israelis who tended to stress the need for self-reliance the US failure to prevent Taiwan's expulsion from the United Nations in 1971 was clear evidence that reliance on a world power was unlikely to provide Israel security. Likewise, US policy toward the Republic of South Africa seemed inconsistent, leading many Israelis to question the value of US-Israeli relations. Moreover, relations with the United States did not earn Israel dividends in the countries of the Third World. Israel's renewed attempts to establish diplomatic relations with the Asian countries was in a large measure a byproduct of its desire to alter its image as an American client state and an imperialist tool.

The events that followed the Six Day War and the intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict had isolated Israel in the international community and forced its leaders to seek better relations with the Asian countries. However, the lack of a solution to the Palestinian problem stood in the way. Israel's isolation was even more pronounced following the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Japan yielded to Arab pressure and stated its intention to reassess its Middle East policy. China denounced Israel and blamed the United States for Israel's refusal to withdraw from Arab-occupied territories. Although Israel voted for China's admission to the United Nations at Taiwan's expense, the Chinese did not seem eager to improve their relations with Israel. In retrospect, it is obvious that Israel has made a wise investment. However, it was not very clear at that time what benefit Israel could expect from a decision which seemed not only immoral but also detrimental to its relations with Taiwan. Likewise, Israeli attempts to win India's good will remained unsuccessful until 1992, and the Burmese, who were initially receptive to the idea of rapprochement with Israel had become disillusioned when Israel failed to live up to its promises to provide adequate agricultural and technical assistance. Moreover, US involvement in Vietnam reduced the likelihood that Israel would be able to establish diplomatic relations in that part of the world. Friendship with the United States remained a major liability for Israel, whose leaders were under constant pressure from American officials to extend recognition to the Saigon government. Unable to demonstrate neutrality in the Vietnamese conflict, as its decision-makers wished they could have done, Israel had little hope of improving relations with North Vietnam. Israel's relations with the United States had a similar impact on North Korea, whose leaders continued to equate Zionism with American imperialism. Likewise, events in Cambodia did not develop in a direction favorable to Israel. Nordom Sihanouk, who favored good relations with Israel, was overthrown in 1970. The pro-American government of Lon Nol continued to maintain cordial relations with Israel; however, with the triumph of the Khmer Rouge in 1975, Israeli-Cambodian relations came to an abrupt end. As for the Muslim states of South-East Asia and Pakistan, there was even less hope for better relations as long as the Palestinian problem remained unresolved. Israel seemed

dangerously isolated at a time when the Palestinians were gaining diplomatic recognition and support in many countries.

Israel's relations with Asian countries were adversely affected by the disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza. Most Asian countries remained distant from Israel and some even downgraded their relations with it. In addition, the Arab boycott prevented countries like Japan from warming to Israel. However, there was a considerable lack of consistency in the Asian countries' attitude toward the Arab boycott. Like Japan, most Asian countries continued to conduct a pragmatic foreign policy. Japan's strict compliance with the Arab boycott was relaxed considerably by 1971, when the Nissan car company decided to open an office in Israel. However, after the Yom Kippur War and the Arab oil embargo the Japanese reversed their policy and began complying more fully with the boycott.

Despite Israel's growing isolation in the international community, Asia continued to remain marginal on the country's foreign policy agenda and Israel's policy toward Asia was neither coherent nor systematic. Israel was willing to establish ties with any country willing to accept its friendship and, motivated by strong ideological convictions, Israel embarked on a campaign aimed at helping the Asian nations in the technological and scientific fields. However, these relations were marked by an absence of real common interests. That Israel did not view Asia as possessing its own unique character is evident from the fact that Asia and Africa were dealt with by one department in the Foreign Ministry. It was only in the summer of 1994 that a separate Asian department was established. The inclusion of two important regions in one department was not merely an economic imperative or an outcome of efficiency considerations, it was an obvious testimony to the fact that Asia remained marginal in the eyes of Israel's Foreign Ministry.

It matters little whether or not Israel of the late 1970s was more isolated than before. What mattered was that Israeli leaders perceived the country's isolation as dangerous. Israeli foreign policy analyst, Michael Brecher, argued that decision-makers 'act in accordance with their perception of reality, not in response to the reality itself'.¹⁴ Naturally, the leaders' desire to put an end to what they perceived as Israel's isolation led to renewed attempts at rapprochement with Asian countries.

One of the arguments made in this study is that Israel has made efforts at rapprochement with these countries but did not always manage to take advantage of favorable circumstances in order to accelerate the normalization process. Although full diplomatic relations with Asia's most populated countries were not established until the early 1990s, there were substantial contacts and collaboration with them in many areas such as science and agriculture. Trade between Israel and these countries increased considerably throughout the years and even included a substantial exchange of civilian and military hardware.

It is the author's conviction that both sides can be held responsible for the absence of full diplomatic relations during most of Israel's existence. This was especially the case in the Sino-Israeli relations, which had long been delayed due to pragmatic considerations on both sides. Japan's relations with Israel suffered throughout these years primarily due to its dependence on Middle Eastern oil, a need which forced the Japanese to yield to Arab pressure and to participate in boycotting Israel. Japan's unwillingness to establish diplomatic relations with Israel was not an outcome of anti-Semitism and ideology never

played a significant part in it. As for the other nations in the area, their traditional attitude toward Israel was generally dictated by the role they played in the constellation formed by the Cold War. Pro-communist nations such as North Korea remained hostile to Israel, while pro-American nations such as the Philippines maintained cordial relations with it. Most Asian countries, even those friendly to Israel, supported anti-Israeli resolutions in the United Nations and championed the cause of the Palestinians. Yet they maintained economic contacts with Israel throughout most of the country's years of existence. In any event, formal diplomatic relations could not become reality before the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Asia's continued reluctance to warm to Israel throughout the 1970s and 1980s was in large measure due to the impasse in the Middle East peace process. The turning point in Asia's attitude toward Israel began in the mid-1980s. But even then not all countries began to warm to Israel. The two leading countries to begin the process of rapprochement with Israel were China and Japan. Under Deng Xiao Ping, China abandoned its commitment to communist ideology and began pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy. One of the major objectives of the new Chinese regime was to modernize its country and its army. Therefore, Israel was viewed as a possible partner in this endeavor and a tacit contact between the two countries got underway. This was an opportunity for Israeli Foreign Ministry officials to reassess their policy toward Asia and for the first time a systematic approach to Asia began to be pursued. An official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry has told the author: 'I must say that Israel's relations with China and Japan were the only examples in which the Israeli approach was marked by patience and initiative. This is the first time that I can talk about an Israeli strategy towards Asia or toward a few Asian countries.'¹⁵ Ambassador Nahum Eshkol, who was in Japan when the Gulf War erupted, argued that the turning point in the relations between the two countries was Israel's restraint during the war in the face of Scud missile bombardment of its major population centers. The fact that Arab unity was no more than a myth became obvious to the Japanese, and Israel was no longer regarded as the only cause of instability in the region. In addition, the Japanese were highly encouraged by the progress made in the peace process. From that point, the number of Asian countries that became interested in normal relations with Israel increased dramatically. In the first half of 1990, Israel's trade with Asia increased by 17 percent compared with the previous year. Sources in the Ministry of Trade and Industry said that Israel's exports to Asian countries amounted to US\$971 million and imports to US\$459 million. The bulk of this trade consisted of diamonds.¹⁶ South Korea agreed to the establishment of an Israeli embassy in Seoul. Shortly thereafter, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China and India decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. For the first time in its long relationship with the Asian countries Israel was gaining a significant hold in this vast continent.

The relative neglect of Asia was by no means a result of Israel's inability to appreciate Asia's potential. Officials in the Israeli government as well as in the Foreign Ministry were well aware of Asia's potential. However, given its limited resources and its security needs, Israel continued to give priority to its ties with the West. Viewed from an Asian perspective, Israel assumed greater proportions than its natural size. Its perceived influence in Washington was a major catalyst in the rapprochement process.

Now that most Asian countries have upgraded their relations with Israel, the main

objective is to accelerate the process of normalization with countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, all of which have sent signals toward Jerusalem but made rapprochement with Israel contingent upon progress in the Middle East peace process and the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The recent outburst of violence in the West Bank and Gaza left the future of Israel's relations with Asia somewhat uncertain. However, despite their official denunciations of Israel's policy in the occupied territories the countries of Asia do not seem anxious to sever their diplomatic ties with Israel.

The purpose of this volume is to provide an analysis of Israel's relations with Asian countries that have either established diplomatic relations with Israel or are in the process of normalizing their relations with it. Although much had been written about Israel's relations with some Asian countries many others were left unexplored. Moreover, the lack of a comprehensive volume dealing with the evolution of these relations from the early days of the Jewish state to the present is obvious and somewhat surprising. The study examines the domestic factors which determined the attitude of each country toward Israel. The main argument presented in this volume is that throughout most of the years of its existence Israel treated the Asian continent as an area of marginal importance and that it was not until the mid-1980s that the Asian countries embarked on a process of normalization and thereby ushered in a new era in Israeli foreign policy characterized by a systematic approach toward Asia. The expansion of Israel's ties with the Asian countries is explained against the background of a changing world environment in which the demise of the Soviet Union, the decline of Pan-Arabism and the onset of the Middle East peace process have played a major role.

In this process of rapprochement Israel was the one to take the initiative on most occasions. Israel offered technological, agricultural and scientific assistance, as well as arms on reasonable credit terms. Politicians and journalists were often used in order to establish contacts with government officials in Asian countries. Furthermore, Israel attempted to establish contacts by using other countries as mediators and lobbyists. Most of these countries remained reluctant to acknowledge the fact that they have been lobbying for Israel, although in some cases these efforts became public. Thus for example, in the early spring of 1993 Radio Hong Kong announced that Australia had been lobbying South-East Asian nations in an effort to win wider support for Israel. According to Australia's Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, this move was in response to a request by Israeli officials who were eager to improve relations with Asian countries, especially those with large Muslim populations.¹⁷

Israeli diplomacy had such remarkable success that even Foreign Ministry officials were surprised. The last target of Israeli foreign policy is to normalize relations with the Muslim countries of Asia. Although there are clear indications that these countries have softened their attitude toward Israel, the violence in the occupied territories and the standstill on the peace process still constitute a major stumbling block on the way to normalization.

This study deals with Israel's relations with most countries in Asia, with the exception of Afghanistan, whose contacts with Israel were minimal and inconsequential. Afghanistan remained rabidly anti-Israeli and the Israeli Foreign Ministry was not keen on trying to approach Kabul. Israel's main concern in the early days was to save the 4,000 Jews who still remained in Afghanistan.¹⁸ It was only under intense pressure from

Israel and world Jewry that Kabul agreed to allow the Jews to leave.¹⁹ Ever since, the Afghan government has not missed any opportunity to denounce Israel as an aggressor and to demonstrate sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people.²⁰ The country's occupation by the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime discouraged the Israelis from making further contacts.

This study is divided into six parts. The first part deals with Israel's peripheral diplomacy, which recounts the course of its relations with Turkey and Iran. The second part provides an overview of Israel's relations with the states of East Asia (China, Taiwan, Japan, South and North Korea). The third part deals with the countries of South-East Asia (Burma, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines). The fourth part provides an analysis of Israel's rapprochement with India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The fifth part explores the recent attempts made by Israel to reach Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia and the sixth part discusses Israel's spectacular success in establishing diplomatic relations with Mongolia and the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan).

I wish to express my gratitude to all those individuals who assisted me in this endeavor. First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of staff at the following institutions: the Harry Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem; the Public Record Office in London and the Firestone Library at Princeton University. I would also like to thank the officials of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, particularly Nahum Eshkol, Chaim Choshen and Eliezer Karny and others from the Asian Division whose valuable insights helped me understand Israel's foreign policy in that region. This study would not have been possible without occasional grants, which I received from the Department of History at the United States Air Force Academy. Above all, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my family, whose patience and encouragement helped me complete this study.

NOTES

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19. For a detailed account of this episode see Benzion D.Yehoshua-Raz, *From the Lost Tribes in Afghanistan to the Mashhad Jewish Converts in Iran* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1992), pp. 294–303 [Hebrew].
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Part I
The Middle East Periphery

1

Turkey—Low-profile Diplomacy

The ties between Israel and Turkey date back to the early days of the Jewish state's existence. However, it was not until 1991 that the two countries established full diplomatic relations. Low-profile contacts were maintained between the two countries despite Turkey's condemnation of Israel in the United Nations and other international organizations. Frequent statements made by Turkish officials regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian predicament convey the impression that the bilateral relations have been far more hostile than was actually the case. This impression is quite misleading, for throughout the years the two countries maintained political, commercial, cultural and even military contacts. The purpose of this chapter is to show the extent of this cooperation; to assess the impact of domestic as well as external constraints on the bilateral relations and to demonstrate how they remained cordial during most of Israel's half century of existence. Throughout the entire period both sides were interested in maintaining a low-profile relationship and therefore chose not to reveal the nature of their relationship. It was only toward the end of the 1980s, when the international political climate underwent a major upheaval with the collapse of the Cold War order, that the ties between the two countries became official and overt.

Whereas the relations with Israel constituted a major problem in Turkish diplomacy, Israeli foreign policy was relatively free from hesitations and constraints.¹ For Israeli foreign-policy-makers it was always desirable to establish normal relations with Turkey, whose location on the periphery of the Middle East enhanced its strategic importance. Turkey, on the other hand, was forced until the end of the Cold War to bring into consideration various factors, which limited its freedom in foreign policy. As a Muslim country, Turkey was compelled to demonstrate solidarity with the Arab states. Consequently, its policy toward Israel was in large measure determined by the twists and turns of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As the conflict intensified, Turkey was forced to distance itself from Israel and the bilateral relations did not improve until the conflict subsided and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians began. The imperatives of the Cold War had a major impact on the bilateral relations because Turkey's foreign policy was affected by its political alignment with the United States and NATO. This association pulled it away from the Soviet orbit and thereby allowed its relations with Israel to remain friendly.

Turkey's aversion to communism had an adverse effect on the bilateral relations during the early days of the Jewish state's existence. So intense was Turkey's aversion to communism that Israel's socialist orientation was regarded with suspicion. From Ankara's point of view, rapprochement with Israel was risky because it was liable to alienate the Arabs whose political and economic cooperation had increased considerably by the early 1960s, when Turkey became involved in a conflict with Greece over Cyprus.

Consequently, Turkey did not give publicity to its contacts with Israel until the Arabs themselves were ready to come to terms with it.

Israel's location in the heart of a hostile Arab world left it little choice but to attempt to escape isolation by establishing relations with the states on the periphery of the Middle East, which included Ethiopia, Turkey and Iran, all of which were uneasy about the Pan-Arab sentiment which engulfed the region when Egypt's President Gamal Abd al Nasser dominated the Arab world.² Turkey's reasons for maintaining normal relations with Israel were particularly compelling. This was primarily due to its proximity to Europe and the role that it fulfilled in the alliances of the Cold War. Both Turkey and Israel had a cultural affinity with Europe, and friendly relations between them were made possible because neither Turkey nor Israel harbored mutual hatred. Moreover, until the recent decades Ataturk's promotion of secularism as one of the key principles of modern Turkey had kept it distant from its Arab neighbors. Ataturk's determination to introduce Western ideas and practices is still admired in Israel. Also, Turkey's treatment of Jews encouraged rapprochement between the two countries. While Jews in Arab countries were victims of persecution and were often used as hostages, their Turkish brethren enjoyed political and economic freedom. Turkey's Jewish population prospered under Ataturk's regime and continued to thrive thereafter. More than 24,000 Jews still live in Turkey and of the 120,000 Turkish Jews living in Israel many travel frequently to Turkey. Asked by one of the leading activists of the Federation of Sephardic Jews in Israel, Reuven Kashani, to describe Turkish treatment of Jews, Turkey's Chief Rabbi, David Asseo said:

The regime's attitude is benign. There is no anti-Semitism. There is complete freedom, of course, within the boundaries of a law that was granted to all other citizens. There are no manifestations of discrimination against us. We enjoy both civil and religious rights. Throughout all these years there has been immigration to Israel from all Turkish cities, and we did not encounter any hindrance on the part of the authorities to do so. Every Jew who is a Turkish citizen and asks to immigrate to Israel obtains permission to do so, and as you are well aware, many have arrived and settled in all parts of the country.³

Turkey's attitude toward the Jews helped smooth the way to normal relations between the two countries. Barred from visiting their neighboring Arab countries, Israeli tourists could always travel to Turkey. Unrestricted travel to Turkey was especially significant for the Israelis whose country's isolation led them to develop a strong siege mentality. However, the Turkish government could not establish cordial relations with Israel as a matter of course. There was a need to strike a balance between two objectives: first, to develop normal relations with Israel as Turkey's alliance with the United States required; and second, to maintain normal ties with the Arab states as Turkey's connection to the Islamic world and its economic needs demanded.⁴ Foreign relations required caution, skill and clever diplomatic maneuvering because Turkey is a Muslim country. Turkey's distant location on the periphery of the Arab world gave it a certain degree of immunity, although its leaders often found themselves unable to ignore the tide of Pan-Arabism.

Initially, the idea of a Jewish state in the heart of the Middle East seemed frightening to the Turkish leaders who preferred British presence in the area over the prospects that the

Soviet Union would use the newly established state as a base of operations in the area.⁵ Therefore, Turkey's initial reaction was negative as much from an aversion to communism as from a fear of alienating the Arabs and the rest of the Muslim world. When the UN General Assembly voted on a Partition Plan for Palestine in November 1947, Turkey voted against the resolution, but when the Arab states protested that the UN recommendation was contrary to the provisions of its Charter, Turkey made no comment. It remained neutral during Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and did not allow Turkish volunteers to join the Arab forces. Turkey's contribution to the Arab cause was meager—a small training team was dispatched to Syria and some supplies were shipped to the Palestinians.⁶ Seeking to ward off Arab criticism, Turkey did not grant official recognition to the newly established Jewish state until 28 March 1949, and when Israel applied for membership in the United Nations Turkey abstained.⁷ Turkey's Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak deemed it necessary to defend his country's stand by saying that Israel was a reality which more than 30 countries had already recognized, and in response to critics who accused his government of betraying the Arab cause he argued that the Arabs themselves had already negotiated with Israel in Rhodes.

Turkey's tendency to maintain normal relations with Israel was largely due to its alignment with the West. Its initial objective was to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to create what one Turkish diplomat described as 'a united Occident front against the Orient'.⁸ However, mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict proved to be much more complicated than the Turkish government had anticipated. Israel's victory in the War of Independence bolstered Turkey's confidence that its rapprochement with Israel would not lead to retribution from the Arabs. Moreover, Turkish diplomats doubted that the Arabs were capable of contributing to their country's defense.⁹ Therefore, Ankara began taking overt steps aimed at normalizing its relations with Israel. In January 1950, Seyfullah Esin, a Turkish Chargé d'Affaires, was sent to Tel-Aviv, and in 1952 both sides appointed ministers. This was part of a pro-Western policy aimed at enabling Turkey to achieve full membership in NATO.¹⁰

Turkey's firm stand on the side of the West and its participation in the Korean War had further increased its importance in the eyes of the Israelis who felt abandoned by the Soviet Union after Stalin changed his pro-Israeli policy. Following his meeting with Herbert Morrison, Israel's minister in London Elyahu Eilat wrote to the Foreign Ministry:

What is obvious in my opinion is that we ought to strengthen our ties with Turkey and to convince the policy makers in Ankara that Israel is a natural ally for them and that except for the Turks we are the only ones capable of being a valuable military factor in case of an attack on the Middle East. Any help and support that we would get from the Turks, when needed, would be greater than any other since the Turks are sitting in the Middle East and are destined to fulfill a very important role in any future circumstance.¹¹

The cooperation between the two countries had gradually expanded. Commercial and military deals were struck and Israel began to provide Turkey with technical training and intelligence.¹² The Mossad had operated an intelligence station in Turkey since the early

1950s.¹³ This, however, was not sufficient to allay Turkish suspicions and uncertainties. Although Ben Gurion declared his country's commitment to non-identification in foreign policy, the existence of strong left-wing parties left doubt in the mind of the Turkish government regarding Israel's political orientation. The ruling Mapai Party was clearly socialist in character. Achdut Ha'avoda had a clear socialist platform and some of its members were inspired by Marxist ideas. The more radical Mapam Party called for 'some identification' with the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The Turkish government expected Israel to remain pro-Western and protested against what it regarded as 'Bolshevik' trends.¹⁵ Mapam's sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union lingered until the mid-1950s, when Moscow began to adopt a clear pro-Nasser policy and armed the Egyptian army.¹⁶ As for the Israeli Communist Party, its members were busy debating whether to support the Soviet Union or China when communism would spread to the Middle East.¹⁷ Party leaders such as Moshe Sneh regarded the Soviet Union as a model for the society they wished to establish in Israel while more radical communists like Meir Wilner called for the formation of a communist society under the auspices of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Soviet support for Israel during the early years was still fresh in the minds of Turkish statesmen. Moreover, the religious elements within Turkey intensified their activities against the possibility of a rapprochement between the two countries. Thus for example, the National Federation of Turkish Students bitterly opposed any contacts with Israel. In one of their meetings in early January 1951, they voiced violent slogans and insults against laicism, Kemalism, Masonry and Judaism. They went as far as issuing a communiqué saying:

There is no religious reaction in Turkey. There is, on the contrary, the attachment of the noble Turkish nation to sacred things. The nation has now understood that it is the Communists, the Masons and the Zionists who qualify Islamism as reaction because they want to break the religious and national unity.¹⁹

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Turkish government remained uncertain regarding Israel's foreign policy orientation and even Ben Gurion's initial decision to support the United States during the Korean War did not put an end to these suspicions. Ben Gurion was aware of Turkey's sensitivities and convincing the Turkish government that Israel was not pro-communist became a high priority on his government's agenda. There were other discouraging factors such as the uncertainty as to whether the Jewish minority in Turkey would tend to be loyal to Israel rather than to its country of residence. Moreover, the natural competition between the two countries caused tension and suspicion. Israel's technological know-how and the temerity evinced by its businessmen were a source of admiration and envy at the same time. Throughout this entire period, Arab pressure did not subside, forcing the Turkish government to maintain a low profile in its relations with the Jewish state. When asked to comment about the rumors that General Moshe Dayan's visit to Turkey was intended to bring about a military agreement between his country and Israel, Foreign Minister Fuad Kuprulu said that the visit was a private matter and that the Turkish government had nothing to do with it. He added that if Turkey wanted to invade the Arab states it could have done so without collaborating with Israel.²⁰ He also denied reports that his country exported goods of Israeli origin to Arab

countries, adding that Turkey was interested in cordial relations with the Arab states and that it did not conceal its dealings with other nations.²¹

The Arabs did not conceal their disappointment whenever it was obvious that Turkey was warming to Israel. In 1951 Turkey joined the West in protesting Egypt's decision to deny Israeli ships passage through the Suez Canal. This caused a serious crisis in Turco-Egyptian relations.²² Arab pressure compelled Turkey not only to distance itself from Israel but also to recall its ambassador shortly after he was sent there.²³ Commercial contacts with Israel continued nevertheless, but they were not made public.²⁴ Moreover, Turkey enabled Jewish immigrants to pass through its territory on their way to Israel. The two countries maintained contact in the United Nations and Israel kept the Turkish government informed regarding its contacts with the West.

This state of affairs continued throughout the 1950s, and Turkey often assumed the role of an honest broker in the Arab-Israeli dispute. For example, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who visited Washington in June 1954, called upon the Arabs to recognize Israel. Shortly afterwards, Nasser denounced Turkey's pro-Israeli policy, saying that it led to Turkey being 'disliked in the Arab world'.²⁵ Nevertheless, the bilateral relations remained cordial and even Nasser's fiery speeches did not keep the two countries apart. This was largely because Turkey became involved in discussing security arrangements with the West. Turkey's objective was to be part of a defense pact which the Western countries were planning for the Middle East. Turkey's participation in these negotiations was contingent upon normal relations with Israel. Caught between the need to maintain normal relations with Israel and the desire to avoid Arab criticism, Ankara was forced to adopt a low-profile policy toward Israel. Not only did it refrain from severing its diplomatic ties with the Arab states but it also issued pro-Arab foreign policy communiques. However, at the same time covert military cooperation and commercial contacts with Israel continued.

When Air France decided to provide services from Tel Aviv to Tehran, with connections to Pakistan and the Far East, Turkey did not prohibit flying over its territory. The Arab League Boycott Office reprimanded Turkey for trading with Israel by using Cyprus as an emporium.²⁶ Meanwhile, trade was increasingly becoming an important element in the bilateral relations. Both countries endeavored to increase their foreign exchange and each had commodities that the other could benefit from. Israel imported large quantities of cotton, wheat, oils and other agricultural products. Turkey received various manufactured products such as kitchen appliances, fertilizers and pharmaceuticals. From Turkey's viewpoint, Israel fulfilled another important function: it could supply Turkey with commodities that were not easily accessible through normal channels. Turkey's pro-West orientation left it incapable of benefiting from the markets of the Soviet bloc. Thus Israel became engaged in three-way covert deals: supplying Turkey with goods from the countries of Eastern Europe and re-exporting Turkish goods to them.²⁷ In addition to this commercial interchange the military collaboration continued and Mossad experts began training agents of the Turkish secret services.²⁸ However, apart from such illicit economic cooperation no significant political contacts developed between the two countries until the late 1950s. The diplomatic representatives sent by the two countries never ranked higher than *Chargés d'Affaires*.

Israeli-Turkish relations were determined more by pragmatic considerations than by

ideology. Israel's desire to escape isolation prompted it to seek the friendship of countries surrounding its hostile Arab neighbors. Although he often spoke about his country's commitment to non-identification, Ben Gurion aspired to join a Western alliance. As early as 1950, he proposed that the United States help Israel by providing arms and equipment to an Israeli force of 250,000 men who would eagerly aid Turkey and the Western countries to resist Soviet aggression.²⁹ When the negotiations regarding the formation of a regional defense organization began it became clear to him that the states of the region would object to Israel's participation. Indeed, neither Greece nor Turkey welcomed Israel's participation in the Middle East Command, which the Western powers were attempting to form at that time. Reacting to Ben Gurion's attempt to join the Middle East Command, Turkey's Minister to Israel expressed his country's hope that Israel would adopt what he termed a 'realistic attitude' and refrain from joining the organization before all Arab states did.³⁰

Turkey's cautious attitude persisted throughout the negotiations leading to the formation of the Baghdad Pact. Unwilling to antagonize the Muslim members of the pact, the Turkish government felt compelled to prevent the possibility that Israel would be included in it and did so by appealing to Israel to return to the borders of the Partition Plan.³¹ From Ben Gurion's point of view, this demand was unrealistic. Nevertheless, the stormy events of the mid-1950s forced him to take Turkey into consideration. He did his utmost to promote friendship with Turkey and continued to regard it as one of the most important states on the periphery of the Arab world with which it was essential to form an alliance. The fact that Israel was not called upon to play a role in the Baghdad Pact, designed to provide security to the West against the rising tide of Arab nationalism, which intensified Israel's isolation, compelled Ben Gurion to consider other alternatives.

The Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1954, which stated that a British withdrawal was imminent, caused much concern in Israel. Ben Gurion's attempt to delay the retreat by impairing Anglo-Egyptian relations caused a major fiasco that became later known as the Lavon Affair.³² Turkey did not sever its relations with Israel; however, its desire to incorporate Iraq into the Baghdad Pact compelled it to adopt some anti-Israeli measures. Consequently, its policy toward Israel became confused and inconsistent. It continued to exchange diplomats with Israel while refusing to recognize its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, it supported an addendum to the pact, stating that the articles relating to military assistance in time of crisis would be valid only if they were specifically related to the Palestine problem. The Israeli government was outraged and voiced its resentment. Nevertheless, the Turkish government continued to display a friendly attitude until the Suez Affair. When anti-Greek mobs plundered Jewish property in Istanbul during the Cyprus crisis in the autumn of 1955, the Turkish government found it appropriate to apologize and reassure Israel that it had 'no intention or inclination to prejudice in any way the security or the rights of the Jews of Turkey'.³³

The Suez Affair forced the Turkish government to issue a public statement condemning Israel as an aggressor and to withdraw its minister from Tel Aviv, stating that he would not resume his duties 'until the Palestine question is solved in a just and lasting manner in accordance with the United Nations resolutions'.³⁴ Moreover, the Turkish representation was downgraded to a legation level. This formal denunciation of Israel did little more than pay lip service to Muslim pressure. According to an

announcement made by Radio Pakistan, the Muslim members of the Baghdad Pact met in the Iraqi capital in November 1956, and decided that Turkey should sever its diplomatic relations with Israel. An official at the British Embassy in Ankara reported that the Israeli minister was gravely concerned, saying that this would be a serious blow for Israel in view of the fact that Turkey was the only Muslim country which maintained diplomatic relations with Israel and that once severed they would be very difficult to restore.³⁵ As it turned out, however, Turkey did not take such a drastic measure. Even the Arab states seemed willing to soften their position. According to the Iranian Foreign Minister the delegates at the conference agreed that Turkey recall its minister from Israel but not sever diplomatic relations.³⁶ Although technically the representatives of the two countries ranked no higher than *Chargés d'Affaires*³⁷ the diplomatic exchange remained as active as it had been in the past and the diplomats as skillful as they had always been. There was nothing unusual or radical about the new Turkish stand since Western countries condemned Israel as well. The Israelis seem to have understood Turkey's predicament; however, they expected its government to moderate its criticism, which they regarded as a consequence of surrender to Arab pressure.

As it turned out, Turkey's criticism of Israel raised false hopes in the Arab world. The Turkish government was not ready, nor capable of complete departure from its pro-Israeli policy. Its alignment with the West discouraged it from being overly hostile to the Jewish state. Turkey's main concern at that point was to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining greater influence in the Middle East by capitalizing on Arab discontent. The Turkish government voiced its concern that the Soviet Union was determined to increase its influence in the area at all costs, and Turkey's Foreign Minister Fatin Zorlu's argument that the Soviet bloc was 'resorting to large-scale propaganda and infiltration aimed at the countries of the Middle East and Africa'³⁸ reflected Turkish fears at that period and convinced Ankara to continue relying on the West. The outcome was that Turco-Israeli relations were to remain friendly despite the major upheavals in the region.

The intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which came as a result of the Lavon Affair and the subsequent Suez debacle, compelled Ben Gurion to consider the possibility of forming an alliance with Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia. Officials in Turkey were aware of Nasser's machinations and therefore became receptive to any idea that might bolster their country's defense.³⁹ In December 1957, Menderes met Eliyahu Sasson, a representative sent by the Israeli government. They agreed that intelligence officials of the two nations meet in June 1958. Also present at the meeting with the countries in the periphery of the Middle East was Reuven Shiloah, the originator of the peripheral alliance idea. After a series of secret and long negotiations Ben Gurion signed the pact that became known as the 'Peripheral Alliance'.

The purpose of the Periphery Doctrine was to prove an argument long held by Israeli politicians that the Middle East was far from being exclusively Arab or Islamic. The essence of this argument, according to Ben Gurion, was that the Turks, the Persians and the Jews were more numerous than the Arabs in the Middle East and that 'through contacts with the peoples of the outer zone area we shall achieve friendship with the peoples of the inner zone, who are our immediate neighbor'.⁴⁰ Several other Israeli politicians shared this idea. Long before becoming Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban wrote, 'The Middle East is not exclusive Arab domain... There are nearly as many non-

Arabs as Arabs in the Middle East (the combined population of Israel, Iran, Ethiopia, Somalia, Turkey and Cyprus is 80,000,000); and the dream of a united Arab domain from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf offends the region's essential diversity.'⁴¹

The attempt to claim that the Middle East is the home of other nations and to bypass the Arab states surrounding Israel was a result of pragmatic considerations. As Gideon Rafael, a former senior Foreign Ministry official explained:

When Israel's policy-makers realized that attempts at breaking the wall of Arab hostility were doomed to failure, they turned their sights elsewhere. Beyond the wall there were important countries in the Middle East and Africa which were accessible to Israel. The two most important of them, Iran and Turkey, though predominantly Moslem, were guided in the conduct of their foreign policy by political rather than religious considerations.⁴²

Neither Turkey nor Iran was happy to see the Middle East become dominated by another charismatic leader like Nasser and therefore responded favorably to Ben Gurion's initiative.⁴³ However, both sought to avoid Arab criticism and therefore negotiated secretly with Israel. This was the first alliance to open the Muslim world to Israel.⁴⁴ Like Iran and Ethiopia, Turkey regarded Nasser as a reckless leader and sought to coordinate its political activities with Israel. Recognizing the significance of its location on the northern border with Syria, Ben Gurion attached considerable importance to Israel's ties with Turkey. In a letter written to President Eisenhower on 24 July 1958, he said, 'The domination of the Arab Middle East by Nasser with the support of the vast power of the Soviet Union would have certain grave consequences for the western world... I need not dwell on what such a course of developments would entail for Israel and Turkey.' Then he went on to describe what Israel had done regarding this matter:

Having watched this danger develop for some years, and having seen the failure of attempts to bring about peace between Israel and Egypt, as you, Mr. President, attempted to do two years ago, we have begun to strengthen our links with four neighboring countries on the outer ring of the Middle East—Iran, Sudan Ethiopia and Turkey—with the object of establishing a strong dam against the Nasserist-Soviet torrent. I am able to record with satisfaction that the first steps taken in this direction have been successful... Recently, our links with the Government of Turkey have grown more intimate in secret channels, apart from and beyond our regular diplomatic relations.⁴⁵

During her visit to Paris in August 1958, Golda Meir met Zorlu and suggested that a high-level meeting take place between the two countries. The meeting took place on 29 August 1958, when Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Shiloah and the Israel Defense Force (IDF) Chief of Staff Chaim Laskov flew to Ankara where they met Menderes and other top Turkish officials. The official excuse given in the Arab world for the presence of the Israeli El Al airliner on Turkish soil was that mechanical problems had forced its landing.⁴⁶ In order to conceal the true nature of these contacts they announced that they had decided to establish cultural ties. In fact, it was secretly agreed that the Mossad and the Turkish National Security Service would exchange intelligence information, if and

when the changes in the region warranted such collaboration.⁴⁷ It was later revealed that they agreed to collaborate against Soviet aggression and radicalism in the Middle East—Israel was to receive information regarding Syrian and Egyptian activities in return for monitoring Soviet behavior in the region.⁴⁸

A similar pact was reached with the Iranian security and intelligence organization (SAVAK), and by the end of 1958, the three agencies agreed to cooperate on a project called 'Trident' and held joint meetings periodically.⁴⁹ Turkey helped the Mossad by sharing information gathered by its agents who operated in Syria while the Mossad trained Turkish agents in counterintelligence techniques and in the use of electronic devices.⁵⁰ These negotiations led to a significant improvement in bilateral relations. Nevertheless, Turkey's decision to leave its formal representation in Tel Aviv at the legation level reflected its determination to maintain low-profile relations with Israel. This was a time of intense Pan-Arab sentiment and Nasser's propaganda continued to affect the Middle East. From Ankara's point of view, full diplomatic relations with Israel could be too risky.

The United States, whose interest was to support all moderate Islamic regimes in the area, did not stand in the way as it often did in Israel's relations with other countries.⁵¹ In fact, the political developments in the region led Washington to regard the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement favorably.⁵² Dangers seemed to lurk everywhere: under Nasser's leadership pan-Arabism reached a climax; the pro-Western Iraqi regime of Nuri al-Said was overthrown in 1958; with General Abd al Karim Qasim at the helm Western interests seemed in jeopardy; Jordan's King Hussein was always regarded as a feeble leader barely capable of protecting Western interests. In addition, the unrest in Jordan led to British intervention in 1958. In the same year, civil war erupted in Lebanon and the United States deemed it necessary to dispatch its forces to prop up Camille Shamoun's regime. Turkey did not turn down United States requests to use the bases on its soil in order to carry out the invasion of Lebanon; like Iran and Pakistan, Turkey expressed its gratitude to President Dwight Eisenhower for his decision to intervene.⁵³ This event reinforced Turkey's alignment with the United States and the Western allies, thus, under these conditions, Israel and Turkey were capable of collaborating without US pressure.

According to Dayan, Israel's Minister of Agriculture during that period, Turkey was one of the states which sought to benefit from Israel's expertise in agriculture.⁵⁴ By the end of 1959, the Israelis were asked to provide technical assistance. The response from Jerusalem was favorable and the Israeli Embassy in Ankara was instructed to find out what Turkey's needs were.⁵⁵ Most Turkish officials were eager to maintain friendly relations with Israel and some were even convinced that Turkey's connection to the Arab world had prevented it from making rapid progress.⁵⁶

The cooperation between the two countries continued in earnest until the Turkish military coup of May 1960. According to an assessment by the British Embassy in Tel Aviv the military regime considered downgrading the bilateral relations as a reaction to Nasser's demand for the surrender of the province of Iskanderun (Alexandretta) which Syria had been claiming all along. It is also likely that the Turkish military regime was concerned that Iran's relations with Israel received considerable publicity and that this would expose Ankara to criticism by the Arab states.⁵⁷ Menderes's demise and the fact that Soviet pressure eased somewhat made it easier for the Turkish government to

maneuver between Israel and the Arab states. Moreover, the anti-Turkish attitude of the United States during the Cyprus crisis, which erupted in 1964, left the Turkish government disillusioned. Turkish officials began realizing that an alliance with the United States was no panacea for all Turkey's foreign policy problems. Consequently, they felt less obligated to maintain good relations with Israel, and Turkish foreign policy began to shift toward the Arabs and the Third World. Even the attempt by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to improve the bilateral relations, at his meeting with Ismet Inonu in Paris in July 1964, failed to produce significant results—Turkey used the Palestinian refugee issue as an excuse to avoid direct dialogue with Israel.⁵⁸ Reacting to Turkey's evasive behavior, Golda Meir told the Turkish Foreign Minister that Israel could not be expected to be content with any thing less than equal standing with the Arab states.⁵⁹ Turkish diplomats still refused to make any commitments. They even tied the issue of normalization to the Cyprus conflict, saying that Turkey would not be able to normalize relations with Israel until the Cyprus problem was resolved.⁶⁰ Israel's sympathetic attitude toward Cyprus was not well received in Ankara.⁶¹ However, despite the fact that the relations were cool on the political level, Turkey, like many other countries, had learned to appreciate the technical expertise of the Israelis and wished to continue benefiting from it. Moreover, Nasser's ambitions to dominate the Arab world were a menace to Turkey and diplomats in Ankara were aware of the potential political value of maintaining contacts with Israel.⁶² They sought to reassure the Israelis that Turkey's efforts to maintain cordial relations with the Arab states would not have an adverse effect on the bilateral relations.⁶³

Nasser's attempt to harness Pan-Islamic support to the Arab cause made it difficult for any Islamic country to maintain overt relations with Israel. In *The Philosophy of the Revolution* he made it abundantly clear that his country played a pivotal role in Arab, Islamic and African circles.⁶⁴ Consequently, Turkish foreign policy continued to operate under severe constraints.

The Six Day War and the subsequent events which intensified the Arab-Israeli conflict made it even more difficult for the Turkish government to identify with Israel. When Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran, shortly before the war, the maritime powers demanded that the Gulf of Aqaba be reopened to Israeli ships. To avoid Nasser's criticism, Turkey refrained from joining them, and furthermore, Turkey exchanged information with the Arabs regarding Israel's intentions. According to the testimony of high-ranking Jordanian government officials, Turkey's ambassador visited Jordan's King Hussein on 3 June 1967, and informed him that Israel would start its offensive on 5 or 6 June with an air strike on Egypt's air bases.⁶⁵ The events which unfolded in early June confirmed the accuracy of the ambassador's information.

Turkey's official attitude was similar to what it had been after the Suez Affair. Following the Six Day War it deplored the occupation of Arab land and supported UN Resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from territories conquered during the war but also asserted that all states in the region had the right to live within secure and recognized boundaries. Furthermore, Turkey urged Israel to allow the Palestinians to return to their homeland and refused to recognize any change in the status of the Arab-Israeli borders, including Jerusalem.⁶⁶ In a joint communiqué dated 11 September 1967, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and Jordan's King Hussein, who visited Turkey at that

time, stated that Israel should withdraw from all occupied territories and implement the UN resolutions on Jerusalem.⁶⁷

Several days later, Demirel was on a visit to the Soviet Union where he affirmed Turkey's opposition to the occupation of land by force and called for an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories.⁶⁸ He made a similar statement during his visit to Iraq the following month.⁶⁹ This was a period in which Turkey managed to play the role of honest broker without seriously offending Israel or the Arabs,⁷⁰ partly because most world leaders, even those who were friendly to Israel, supported UN Resolution 242. However, Turkey's diplomatic tour de force, which was aimed at improving its ties with the Arab states, proved detrimental to the bilateral relations. Israel's argument that Turkey could maintain relations with both sides had fallen on deaf ears in Ankara. By early December 1967, Turkey signed an economic agreement with Egypt totaling US\$22–24 million. It also signed an agreement to purchase Iraqi oil. Turkey's attempt to mend fences with the Arab states was exploited to the full by the Syrian government which stated its willingness to conduct talks about resolving the territorial conflict between the two countries and offered compensation for land which it had confiscated from Turkish nationals.⁷¹

On his visit to Tunis in the autumn of 1968, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ihsan Sabri Caglayangil found it convenient to join Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba in a joint communiqué regarding the need to solve the Middle East conflict according to UN Resolution 242.⁷² Expressed by a Turkish statesman on a visit to a country that the Israeli government considered moderate, such a statement did not have grave consequences for the bilateral relations. However, this 'benevolent neutrality' policy was short-lived. At a banquet held in honor of Iraqi dignitaries, Demirel restated his country's opposition to the occupation of land by force and expressed its support of UN Resolution 242.⁷³ The Turkish government was under pressure not only from the Arab states but also from radical groups inside Turkey. These groups pressured the government to pursue an anti-Western and anti-Israeli policy. In May 1971, the Israeli Consul General Ephraim Elron was captured by the Turkish People's Liberation Front. This event culminated in the establishment of a military regime in Turkey⁷⁴ and dissuaded the government from upgrading its relations with Israel.

The impasse in the Israeli-Arab conflict during the early 1970s, when Golda Meir was in power, had an adverse effect on the bilateral relations. Arab pressure mounted to such an extent in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War that Turkey, whose economy heavily depended on oil supplied by OPEC, went as far as allowing Soviet aircraft to fly over its territory while barring the United States from using its bases in order to help Israel. Turkey's dependence on oil did not allow it to ignore OPEC's demand to sever its relations with Israel, nor did it wish to be denied any economic opportunities that were opening up in the oil-producing Arab countries. By denying the United States the ability to use its airfields the Turkish government angered both them and Israel.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Turkey's Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit continued to argue that his country's policy was to maintain what he called 'positive neutrality'.⁷⁶

The bilateral relations continued to remain cool and even deteriorated when Turkey continued to support Arab-sponsored resolutions in the United Nations, including the one equating Zionism and racism adopted by the General Assembly on November 1975.

Several months earlier, Turkey had recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the legitimate body representing the Palestinian people. Nevertheless, Turkey never failed to appreciate Israel's technical expertise and began purchasing arms from Israel when the bilateral relations seemed tense on the surface. In 1975, Turkey purchased the Israeli-made Shafir air-to-air missiles, Hetz antitank shells, Uzi submachine guns and ammunitions, and there were unconfirmed reports that Israel collaborated with Turkey in the invasion of Cyprus by providing arms and technical know-how.⁷⁷

Economic considerations increasingly determined Turkish foreign policy. The Turkish government welcomed trade relations with Israel but not at the expense of losing the Arab markets. This becomes clear when one follows Turkey's official statements. In the autumn of 1978 Ecevit wrote:

Turkey can be an ideal partner for establishing industries that would not only appeal to Turkey, not only meet the requirements of Turkey's own development, but can also appeal to other countries of the world, particularly those of the Middle East.⁷⁸

Although the 1979 Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt caused disunity in the Arab camp, Turkish policy remained pro-Arab. This was largely due to its continuing dependence on Arab oil, since the Iranian revolution resulted in reduced production and left prices high. Witnessing Egypt's predicament as a pariah in the Arab world, Turkey did not wish to incur Arab wrath and become the target of Syrian and Iraqi criticism. On October 1979, the PLO was allowed to open an office in Ankara and in 1980 the Turkish government denounced Israel's decision to annex East Jerusalem following the Israeli Knesset debate initiated by the radical right-wing parties. Demirel's response to Israel's decision to annex Jerusalem was that such a step would be contrary to international law.⁷⁹ Strong pressure from Turkish right-wing groups and especially from the National Salvation Party forced the government to intensify its anti-Israeli rhetoric. In addition, the Turkish economy was in a state of near collapse at that time, and the lack of hard currency resulted in a desperate need to seek affordable oil, a state of affairs which forced the Turkish government to turn to the Arab oil-producing countries.

Fearful of another harsh winter, Bulent Ulusu's military government decided to increase its oil purchases from the Arab states. In 1980, Turkey purchased 5 million tons of oil from Iraq, 3.4 million tons from Iran, 2 million tons from Libya and 1 million tons from Saudi Arabia.⁸⁰ The Saudis provided Turkey with an additional 2 million tons of oil and US\$75 million in economic assistance. Turkey was expected to reciprocate by severing its relations with Israel.⁸¹ By the end of 1980, the Saudis increased the pressure on the Turkish government by providing it with a loan of US\$250 million, leading the Turkish government to decide to withdraw its legation personnel from Tel Aviv.⁸² The relationship remained on the Chargé d'Affaires level thereafter, and Islamic sentiment continued to play a significant role in keeping Turkey and Israel apart.⁸³ This remained the case despite the fact that Pan-Arabism had weakened considerably since the Camp David accords. Arab solidarity continued to suffer setbacks throughout the 1980s and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait accelerated this process.

The stormy events in Lebanon led to closer intelligence ties between Israel and Turkey. While Palestinian groups operated from Lebanon against Israel, radical anti-Turkish forces used the Bekaa Valley as an operations base against Turkey. In 1982, there were reports of secret cooperation between the Turkish and Israeli security services in the search for Armenian terrorists who had operated from Palestinian bases in Beirut and were later caught by the IDF.⁸⁴ There were additional factors that could have helped to improve the bilateral relations. Arafat's visit to Cairo in December 1983 made Turkey's rapprochement with Israel more easily acceptable in the Arab world. Moreover, the reduction in oil prices during the mid-1980s reduced the risk of an oil embargo against Turkey, which became less dependent on the Arab oil markets. Consequently, contacts between the two countries intensified, with Turkish MPs meeting Shamir in September 1984.⁸⁵ This was followed by another important meeting on 4 April 1985, when Turkey's Foreign Minister Vahit Halefoglu met with Israel's Ambassador Meir Rosenne in Washington. The Turks were highly impressed by Israel's influence in Washington and wished to use it in order to obtain US aid. In addition, the Turkish government sought the support of the Jewish lobby, which was regarded as capable of neutralizing the impact of the pro-Greek and pro-Armenian pressure groups in the US Congress.⁸⁶ This attempt was crowned with success largely due to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, whose personnel used their influence in order to convince members of the Jewish lobby that Israel and Turkey had identical interests.

Turkey's economic importance increased considerably as a result of the Iran-Iraq War and the government became less sensitive to Arab reaction. Nevertheless, Turkish diplomacy could not change dramatically in favor of overt relations with Israel. Even Jewish lobbying efforts in Washington could not drastically change Turkey's attitude toward Israel. The Turkish government still needed Arab diplomatic support for its claim to Cyprus and therefore refrained from openly supporting Israel.⁸⁷ It was politically inconceivable for the Turkish government not to recognize the PLO, which was gaining recognition from many European and Third World countries. Moreover, the bilateral relations suffered as a result of the Intifada, which erupted in the occupied territories in December 1987. Israel's denunciation by world leaders, including those friendly to Israel, left the Turkish government in a quagmire. To condemn the Intifada would have been regarded as a betrayal of the PLO, which was already recognized by most nations as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Turkey's support of the Palestinians continued throughout the 1980s and even the fact that the Turkish government became more overt in its dealings with Israel did not alter its pro-Palestinian policy. As late as January 1991, President Turgut Özal explicitly stated his country's support for the Palestinians.⁸⁸

Although both sides were interested in maintaining close relations, Israel was the one that usually initiated the contacts.⁸⁹ In its attempts to establish an atmosphere of cordial relations Israel had always taken special care to respond to Turkey's needs. Although Israel expressed disappointment over Turkey's official stand, criticism from Jerusalem remained restrained, and Israel never mentioned the negative aspects of Turkish policy. Thus for example, the Turkish massacre of Armenians and other minorities at the beginning of the century was never included in the Israeli educational curriculum nor mentioned in the press. Likewise, Israeli sources refrained from commenting on Turkey's

water project and the construction of the Ataturk Dam.

The events of the late 1980s eased the tension in the Middle East. The Cold War ended, taking with it the specter of the Soviet threat. Turkish leaders no longer felt compelled to be tied to a Western alliance. However, it was still necessary to seek support from the United States, which remained the only great power in the area. Turkish diplomacy became much less constrained since it was relatively free from Arab pressure, and the onset of the Middle East peace talks allowed Turkish diplomacy to be more overt. Gone were the days of Pan-Arabism, when any contact with Israel was regarded as a betrayal of the Arab cause. To those who denounced its association with Israel, the Turkish government could always claim that the Arabs themselves had already come to terms with Israel. This state of affairs allowed Turkey to maneuver more freely between Israel and the Arabs. The conciliatory attitude taken by the Palestine National Council in 1988 paved the way for a dialogue with Israel since the PLO, after a long period of bitter disagreements,⁹⁰ accepted UN Resolution 242, agreed to the principle of land for peace and renounced terrorism.

No account of Israeli-Turkish relations can be complete without considering the tension in Turkey's relations with Syria. This state of affairs led the Turkish government to maintain interest in a strong Israeli state. Turco-Syrian relations add an important dimension without which Turkey's ties with Israel cannot be properly understood. Therefore, they deserve special attention. Turkey's policy toward Israel was determined not only by fear of Pan-Arabism and Nasser's ambitions but also by Syria's aggressive behavior. The bone of contention between Turkey and Syria is the province of Iskanderun, which according to Ataturk's National Pact was to remain part of new Turkey's homeland. However, French occupation of the area during peace negotiations at Lausanne delayed its incorporation into Turkey. The Franco-Turkish Treaty of 20 October 1921 stipulated that the area remain Turkish. In a plebiscite held in that province in 1939, the overwhelming majority opted for reunion with Turkey and the French ceded the province to Turkey. Syria gained independence from France in 1946 and the issue continued to poison relations between the two countries thereafter. The loss of Iskanderun was one of the main reasons for the popularity of the radical left-wing Ba'th party in Syria. Among the first to organize resistance to the Turks in Iskanderun was Zaki al-Arsuzi who also founded a movement called al-Ba'th al-Arabi in 1940. This movement was short-lived but most of its members joined the main Ba'th party which was being formed at that time by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar. In addition to his resentment over Iskanderun, al-Arsuzi belonged to the Alawi minority whose members were defeated and persecuted by the Turks for centuries. Al-Arsuzi brought with him many Alawi members and thus injected into the B'ath party nationalistic and mystical content. Resentment over Iskanderun loomed large in the Ba'th party's propaganda. Turks were constantly reminded of it and the fear of Syrian revenge did not dissipate. The fact that Iskanderun was not mentioned in the meeting between the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers in Ankara in March 1991 did not eliminate Turkish fear.

The fear of losing Iskanderun was one of the factors that led Turkey to cultivate its relations with Israel. From Turkey's point of view, a strong Israeli state capable of keeping Syria at bay was an advantage.⁹¹ Although Turkish officials repeatedly announced that they supported the peace process the possibility of a successful

conclusion to the Israeli-Syrian dialogue raised the specter that Syrian forces could be free to challenge Turkey and to settle the account over Iskanderun, a scenario which did not particularly appeal to the Turkish government. In addition, Syria wanted to have a larger share of the water from the River Euphrates and resented the fact that the newly constructed Ataturk Dam enabled Turkey to cut off Syria's water supplies.⁹²

Syria's traditional role as a haven for anti-Turkish terrorists constituted an additional source of animosity. Moreover, Turkey's pro-Western orientation was never to Syria's liking. Syria provided shelter and encouragement to radical groups of Turks and Kurds and to political movements such as the Armenian Marxist terrorist organization ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia). These groups continued to operate from the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and most of them were in contact with the PLO and other Palestinian groups. The radical Turkish organization known as Apocus, whose aim was to establish a Marxist state in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, collaborated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). One of the group members, Mehmet Girgin, who was caught by the Turkish security forces, gave the following confession:

They took us to Damascus. Then we crossed the border into Lebanon and arrived in their camps there. We have been trained in this military training camp in Palestine on the use of various weapons, handling explosives and bombs and styles of attack and defense. In the meantime, we have also been trained for fighting at close quarters with bayonets just like men of a regular army. After staying in this training camp for three months, we were taken to the Shattul Shavim, also called the Lebanon Organization. They took us from here to the Armenian Secret Army for Liberation. We were trained in this camp in bomb manufacture and types of explosives. While we were in this camp, we knew that a group of 50 to 60 people from Turkey were receiving military training in the camps of the Habbash organization.⁹³

Although Turkey officially continued to support the Palestinians, this association strained its relations with the PLO. Anxious to smear the PLO's reputation, Israel had taken the opportunity to inform Ankara about these contacts. Neither the water problem nor the Kurdish issues were essential for Syria, whose leaders tended to use them against Turkey whenever they deemed it convenient. On 8 January 1990, a group of militants from the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) tried to penetrate Turkey from Syrian territory. The infiltrators, who were caught and killed by the Turkish security forces, carried Syrian identity cards.⁹⁴ Turkey's dissatisfaction with Syrian behavior reached crisis point by the end of 1993. In an exclusive interview with the *Jerusalem Post* correspondent, Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin openly accused Damascus of not keeping its promise to stop supporting the Kurdish terrorists. He complained that terrorists supported by Syria were harassing both Turkey and Israel from their bases in the Bekka Valley.⁹⁵ These terrorists, he said, included the Islamic Jihad, which attacked Israel and the PKK. According to Cetin, military sources in Turkey reported that PKK terrorists who came from Syria crossed the border into Armenia and penetrated Turkey through Iranian territory. Not only did he condemn Syria's involvement in these attempts but also went to the extent of

asking Israel for a joint battle against terrorism. He said, 'We don't think that just and lasting peace can be achieved unless we get rid of terrorist activity in the region... We will not be able to reach real peace in the area if 10 or 20 terrorist groups find a comfortable place in the Bekaa Valley.'⁹⁶

Unwilling to provoke Syria and thus bring the Middle East peace talks to a standstill, Israeli officials responded by saying, 'We are not interested in making enemies... The PKK has never hurt us. We don't have any interest in antagonizing Syria.'⁹⁷ In the same interview Cetin called for a free trade agreement with Israel. Although the Israelis were willing to increase trade with Turkey they had major concerns. Israeli clothes manufacturers feared that such an agreement would bring a flood of cheap garments from Turkey. Nevertheless, economic cooperation between the countries continued. Israel's Trade and Industry Minister, Micha Harish, regarded Turkey as a market with great potential. Israel began the construction of a fully equipped hospital in Istanbul and embarked on a US\$21 billion regional development project in south-east Turkey.⁹⁸ The Turkish government of the post-Özal era was in a quandary. Expressing a desire for Arab-Israeli dialogue has always seemed politically beneficial to Ankara; however, as the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria began to seem imminent, the fear and confusion increased.⁹⁹

The events of the late 1980s were bound to have a salutary effect on the bilateral relations since the constraints on Turkish foreign policy were no longer as formidable as they had been in the past. The end of the Cold War caused changes that could not fail to affect the Middle East. Now Turkish officials could argue that maintaining normal relations with Israel should not come as a surprise to the Arabs who were gradually coming to terms with the Jewish state. Moreover, Turkish foreign policy was impeccably even-handed. The Turks immediately recognized the State of Palestine as proclaimed by the Palestine National Council in November 1988. This recognition was consistent with the Turkish position that the PLO was the sole representative of the Palestinian people and that the best way to resolve the Middle East conflict was according to UN Resolution 242.

Although the Israelis protested at the speed with which Turkey gave its recognition to the Palestinian declaration they were not surprised. Turkey's position did not seem unreasonable nor biased. Moreover, the Turkish government did not let its relations with Israel suffer as a result of its pro-Palestinian gesture. The peace process has often been mentioned in the Turkish press and when Shamir proposed his autonomy plan in May 1989, Ankara welcomed it. In an attempt to demonstrate its impartiality the Turkish government gave an immediate endorsement to another plan proposed by Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in the autumn of 1989.

The improvement in Israel's relations with the states of eastern Europe and especially the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Greece and Israel reassured the Turkish government that rapprochement with Israel was not as risky as it had been in the past.¹⁰⁰ Now there was no danger that the Muslim world would stand behind Greece and condemn Turkey for its decision to normalize relations with Israel. From Ankara's point of view, tarrying on this issue was tantamount to letting Greece and the Balkan states take the lead in the diplomatic game. Turkey intensified its contacts with Israel and began reconsidering the possibility of establishing full diplomatic relations. In the spring of

1990 Turkey agreed to supply water to Israel; however, intense Arab pressure forced it to withdraw its offer.

In the early 1990s, Israel was scoring diplomatic victories everywhere. Asia's most populated countries such as India and China established diplomatic relations with Israel, and others followed their example. Fear of Muslim reaction lingered on in Ankara. One government official told an Israeli journalist that Turkey was the only Muslim country to maintain relations with Israel from the very beginning. He stated that he did a great deal to promote the bilateral relations but asked that the statements should not be attributed to him.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Turkish government overcame its fears and the bilateral relations were openly discussed.

In December 1991, the political climate seemed appropriate and the Turkish government decided to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. Ankara's decision to upgrade its relations with Israel to ambassadorial level was seen in Israel as part of a Turkish bid to play a more active role in the multilateral phase of the peace process.¹⁰² This step led to further cooperation between the two countries. A bilateral trade agreement was signed in March 1993.¹⁰³ An editorial in the daily *Ha'aretz* revealed that Rabin called upon the United States to support Turkey in order to counter Iranian influence in the Middle East.¹⁰⁴ Özal's death raised Israeli fears that the bilateral relations might suffer;¹⁰⁵ however, the friendship reached a peak by the end of 1993, when a Turkish delegation visited the Knesset.¹⁰⁶ Shortly afterwards, Cetin arrived in Israel where he met President Ezer Weizman, Shimon Peres and other officials. The signing of the Strategic Cooperation Agreement between the two countries concluded the meeting. It included the following accords: cooperation in international and regional affairs in order to promote peace; cooperation in military technology transfer between the armed forces of the two countries; joint educational and cultural programs; and agreements to facilitate trade and investments. Cetin stressed his government's resolve to promote peace in the region and pledged a US\$2 million grant for infrastructure development in the Gaza Strip and Jericho along with a US\$50 million soft loan on the successful conclusion of the peace negotiations. Both Weizman and Peres accepted Cetin's invitation to visit Turkey at the beginning of 1994.¹⁰⁷ Yet, despite his positive attitude toward his hosts, Cetin still insisted that a long-lasting peace in the Middle East must be based on the 'land for peace' principle enshrined in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.¹⁰⁸ Also, Turkey continued to pressure Israel to cooperate in erasing the memory of the Armenian massacre that had taken place at the beginning of the century. The Israelis, who came under closer scrutiny by human rights organizations and liberal public opinion, could hardly afford to comply with Turkey's request.¹⁰⁹ Not only was Israel criticized for its brutal handling of the Intifada but also for its relations with South Africa during the apartheid era. Although the response from the Israeli Foreign Ministry was that Israel could no longer comply with Turkey's request to erase the memory of the Armenian massacre the bilateral relations did not seem to be affected by Israel's refusal.¹¹⁰

At the beginning of 1994, Weizman and Peres visited Turkey, where they met Demirel and senior Turkish officials. They agreed to strive for peace and to cooperate in joint projects.¹¹¹ The Israelis showed interest in the Magnavat Spring Project, which could supply them with large quantities of water,¹¹² and on 1 September 1994 both sides began

negotiations on free trade.¹¹³

Turkish leaders continued to maintain the image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. On 16 September 1994 Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and Demirel met Arafat in Ankara. Ciller agreed to Arafat's request to contribute Turkish troops to an international peacekeeping force to be deployed in the Palestinian self-rule areas.¹¹⁴ She also expressed her willingness to embark on joint ventures in Gaza.¹¹⁵ Ciller's sympathy for the Palestinians caused a temporary crisis in Turkey's relations with Israel. In November 1994 Ciller paid a visit to Israel. Rabin announced that the two countries concluded cooperation agreement in such areas as drug smuggling, terrorism and even spoke about collaboration in water projects.¹¹⁶ Ciller told journalists that she would cooperate with Israel in the attempt to find out whence the fundamentalists in Turkey received their funding.¹¹⁷ However, this euphoric atmosphere was clouded by Ciller's decision to visit Orient House, the headquarters of the Palestinian delegation in east Jerusalem. Since the decision was not coordinated with Israel it caused considerable anger in government circles. Rabin angrily responded that Israel had been 'tricked'.¹¹⁸ Unwilling to allow the incident to poison the bilateral relations he stated that the decision was harmful and that 'despite the visit, Israel's relations with Turkey will not worsen'.¹¹⁹ He explained that friendship with Turkey was of the utmost importance because it could play an important role in the peace process and supply water to Israel.¹²⁰ Ciller's agreement to cooperate with the Mossad and the CIA in combating terrorism was greatly appreciated by the Israelis who were determined not to let this incident cloud the bilateral relations.¹²¹ In addition, Turkey agreed to coordinate its commercial ventures in Central Asia with Israel and the United States.¹²²

All these were compelling reasons for normal relations between the two countries and so far both sides seem determined to overcome all obstacles which might hinder mutual understanding. By the late 1990s, the two countries reached agreements on cooperation in numerous areas including the military.¹²³ Turkey sought Israeli cooperation in fighting the PKK and Israel sought Turkish help in its war against the Hizbollah in Lebanon. In February 1996, the two countries decided to expand their military cooperation.¹²⁴ Arab criticism of the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement had mounted considerably as a result. Syria's President Hafez al-Assad was particularly enraged and blamed Turkey for threatening his country's security and the peace in the region.¹²⁵ Israeli officials were concerned that the rise of the Islamic leader Necmettin Erbakan as Prime Minister would adversely affect the bilateral relations.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the cooperation continued and by early Turkey paid Israel US\$75 million to upgrade its fleet of 48 F-5 fighter jets. Turkey also took part in joint maneuvers with Israeli and US vessels off the Haifa coast.¹²⁷

Throughout the entire period that has been examined here the bilateral relations remained cordial and cooperation never ceased. What kept these contacts going was Turkey's basic attitude that it had more in common with Israel than with the Arab states. This mentality was reinforced by Turkey's cultural transformation, which began in the Ataturk era. It seems to have had a significant impact on Turkish foreign policy orientation. However, pragmatic considerations played an important role as well. Israel's ability to provide technical assistance in many fields, including the military, was appreciated in Ankara. Turkey entered the Peripheral Agreement with Israel because it did not wish to confront a Middle East dominated by Nasser and the forces of Arab

nationalism. Moreover, relations with Israel were regarded as a way to improve Ankara's image in the eyes of the Jewish lobby whose members were perceived as capable of manipulating US foreign policy.

Even when the tide of Pan-Arabism subsided and the Egyptian threat was eliminated Turkey had compelling reasons to maintain good relations with Israel. Turkey's pro-Western orientation and its aversion to communism kept it away from the Arab states, which it regarded as Moscow's clients. But even more compelling was the Syrian threat, which intensified as a result of the controversy over Iskanderun and Damascus's assistance to the PKK. Turkey's official stand was that a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict should be found. The Turkish government was concerned that Israel and Syria were about to sign a peace treaty leading to Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. However, this fear was reduced considerably by the late 1990s because the multifaceted Israeli-Turkish relations reduced the likelihood that Turkey's interests would be adversely affected as a result of an Israeli-Syrian settlement. Moreover, Assad's decision to curb the activities of the PKK lessened Turkey's concerns about Syria's aims.¹²⁸

Despite the obvious need for close relations with Israel, pragmatic considerations pulled Turkey in other directions. It was important that Turkey not be seen as a collaborator with the Zionist state, which in the Arab propaganda was perceived to be a tool of Western imperialism. Turkey's economic needs dictated reliance on the Arab markets, especially on oil. In addition, Turkey needed Saudi financial assistance. In the political sphere, Turkey sought to obtain Arab support during the Cyprus crisis. Overt relations with Israel could cost Turkey the loss of numerous Muslim UN members.

Throughout the entire period Turkey attempted with some success to obtain the good will of both sides. Both sides attacked the Turkish government: while the Arabs criticized it for siding with Israel behind their backs, the Israelis reprimanded Turkey for its official anti-Israeli declarations. Arab criticism became harsher and more frequent, whereas the Israelis seem to have understood Ankara's predicament and their protests remained mild. It was rarely possible for the Turkish government to pursue an even-handed policy. Nevertheless, throughout the entire period under investigation Turkey's policy was quite successful. This was particularly true during the late 1960s, when Turkey was capable of demonstrating sympathy with the Arab states by condemning Israeli aggression in the Six Day War without offending Israel, and during the late 1980s, when it was capable of denouncing Israel's suppression of the Intifada without recriminations.

The Israeli-Palestinian dialogue allowed Turkish policy toward Israel to become more open. Overt relations became a possibility when Israel's foreign policy was successful in leading many Asian and African nations to grant it official recognition. When the Balkan States and Greece in particular began to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, Turkey could no longer hesitate. Israel seemed to have become a 'desirable bride'. Turkey had proven that its defense needs were high on the national agenda. It continued to cooperate with Israel and the United States despite Arab criticism. Yet the clashes between Israel and the Palestinians, which intensified in the autumn of 2000 as a result of the failure of Prime Minister Ehud Barak's peace initiative, compelled Turkey to tread more carefully with Israel and to denounce it occasionally. Moreover, Turkey was not pleased with Israel's decision to include the Armenian massacre in its new educational curriculum in the spring of 2000, and a short period of tension in the bilateral relations ensued.¹²⁹

Nevertheless, the bilateral relations are not likely to be seriously affected by such matters and even the recent political events in Turkey are not likely to change the country's foreign policy orientation. Even the growing popularity of Erbakan's Islamic Welfare Party, which is determined to establish stronger links with the Islamic world, is unlikely to harm the bilateral relations.¹³⁰ Fortunately for the state of these relations, the religious and conservative elements in Turkey who are likely to oppose the rapprochement between the two countries remain weak. Turkey's attitude is more likely to be determined by external events reaching beyond the region. The demise of the Soviet Union, which left the United States as the only superpower in the area, provides a certain guarantee that relations with Israel would continue to be in Turkey's best interest in the foreseeable future. Turkey's participation in European organizations and its dependence on US financial support make it difficult for Ankara to sever its relations with Israel. Even the hike in the price of oil in the world market is unlikely to radically alter Turkey's foreign policy orientation in favor of the Arab states. Moreover, Israel and Turkey have successfully cooperated in the scramble for Central Asia. From Ankara's point of view, its dangerous rival in the area is not Israel but Russia.¹³¹ The Israelis continue to regard the collaboration with Turkey in Central Asia as a blessing and Israeli economists believe that the cooperation between the two countries could help turn Turkey into 'a bridge to the Muslim world'.¹³² Moreover, a significant part of the Turkish intellectual elite favors good relations with Israel. Israeli technical and scientific assistance and the growing volume of trade between the two countries make it unlikely that the bilateral relations would take a turn for the worse. Commenting on the state of the bilateral relations Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said that they were 'remarkably wonderful'.¹³³ If the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue resumes Turkey would benefit from its ability to act as an honest broker and its relations with Israel would become friendlier and more overt.

NOTES

1. Turkey was constrained not only by Arab reaction but also by the religious opponents of rapprochement with Israel. For a detailed discussion of the conflict between the religious and secular elements in Turkey caused by the regime's attitude toward Israel see M.Hakan Yavuz, 'Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 22–37.
2. Shimon Peres and Haggai Eshed, *Tomorrow is Now* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1978), p. 299 [Hebrew].
3. Reuven Kashani, *The Jewish Communities in Turkey* (Jerusalem: The Sephardic Federation in Israel, 1978), p. 78 [Hebrew].
4. See M.Hakan Yavuz, 'Turkey's Relations with Israel', *Dis Politika* (Ankara), Vol. 15, Nos 3–4 (1991), pp. 41–69.
5. Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), p. 44.
6. Michael B.Bishku, 'Turkey and Its Middle Eastern Neighbors Since 1945', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring 1992), p. 59.

7. Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1958), pp. 13–15.
8. Sasson to Divon, ISA 2568/GI, 8 January 1950.
9. In his meeting with Eliyahu Sasson in the Israeli Legation in Turkey, Rifki Fasim confirmed Turkey's Foreign Minister's statement to European diplomats that Turkey did not believe in the value of any defense agreement with the Arabs and therefore delayed the talks designed to create a Middle East defense pact. Moreover, he asked if Israel could help influence the American media in Turkey's favor. Sasson to Divon, ISA 2568/GI, 3 September 1950.
10. Ismail Soysal, '70 years of Turkish-Arab Relations and an Analysis on Turkish-Iraqi Relations', *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, No. 6 (1991), p. 49.
11. Eilat to Sasson, ISA 2568/GI, 21 December 1950.
12. See Central Intelligence Agency, *Israel: Foreign Intelligence and Security Services* (Washington, DC, March 1979).
13. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 16.
14. Meir Bareli, *Understanding Ben Gurion* (Jerusalem: Edanim, 1986), p. 136 [Hebrew].
15. Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1978), p. 75 (entry for 24 October 1953) [Hebrew].
16. Peretz Merhav, *The Israeli Left: History, Problems, Documents* (New York: A.S.Barnes & Company, 1980), p. 145.
17. Yechiel Halpern, *Israel and Communism* (Tel-Aviv: Ahdut, 1951), p. 208 [Hebrew].
18. Shaul Kantsler, *The Left-Wing in Israel: Intelligentsia in a Tangle of Alienation* (Tel Aviv: Otpaz, 1984), p. 61 [Hebrew].
19. Sasson to Divon, ISA 2568/7, 13 January 1951.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 28 January 1951.
22. Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1991), p. 76.
23. Nuri Eren, *Turkey Today—and Tomorrow: An Experiment in Westernization* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 238.
24. Walter Henry Nelson and Terence Prittie, *The Economic War Against the Jews* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 142.
25. Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, p. 76.
26. Robert W. Macdonald, *The League of Arab States: A Study in the Dynamics of Regional Organization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 121.
27. *Time*, 10 January 1955, p. 24.
28. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection*, p. 16.
29. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), Vol. 5 (1950) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 960–1.
30. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, pp. 133–4.
31. *Le Monde*, 27 December 1957.
32. The attempt to impair Anglo-Egyptian relations led to the arrest of a few Egyptian

- Jews who were ordered by the Israeli secret service to place bombs in American buildings in Cairo. The group was caught and two of its members were executed. This affair led to Ben Gurion's unpopularity and eventual resignation. See Michael Bar Zohar, *Ben Gurion: A Biography* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986), chapter 20 [Hebrew].
33. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, p. 180.
 34. Cited in Bishku, 'Turkey and Its Middle Eastern Neighbors', p. 61.
 35. Bowker to Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), FO/371, 121700, VR10344/1, 23 November 1956.
 36. Stevens to British Embassy in Tehran, PRO FO/371, 121700, VR103344/1, 24 November 1956.
 37. Nichols to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 121700, VR10344/4, 24 November 1956.
 38. Fatin Rustu Zorlu, 'A Turkish View of World Affairs', *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1 September 1950), p. 685.
 39. The US decision to join the military committee of the Baghdad Pact was unanimously welcomed by the Turkish press. Telegram No. 306 'From Ankara to Foreign Office', PRO F0371, 127738, V10344/3, 27 March 1957.
 40. Cited in Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 278.
 41. Abba Eban, 'Reality and Vision in the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (July 1965), pp. 634–5. (Parentheses in original.)
 42. Cited in Mark Tessler, 'Israel, Arms Exports, and Iran: Some Aspects of Israeli Strategic Thinking', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 1989), p. 115.
 43. Shimon Peres, *David's Sling* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 153.
 44. The idea of forming an alliance with the states of the periphery continued to reappear even when Turco-Israeli relations cooled off in the following decades. It was often discussed by Israeli politicians. Both Shimon Peres and Yigal Allon supported it. See Avner Yaniv, *Politics, Strategy, and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 62–3. Right-wing politicians were even more impressed by it. Thus for example, former Defense Minister Ariel Sharon spoke about it enthusiastically as a desirable solution to Israel's defense problems. See a reprint of a conference on 'Defense and National Economy in the 1980s' held at Tel Aviv University (14 December 1981), in Efraim Inbar, *Israeli Strategic Thought in the Post 1973 Period* [Appendix] (Jerusalem: Israel Research Institute on Contemporary Society, 1982), pp. 24–9.
 45. Text of a letter by Prime Minister Ben Gurion to the President of the United States of America. Eisenhower Papers, International Series, Box 35, Mid East, July 1958 (4), Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS.
 46. Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *The Imperfect Spies* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1990), p. 84; *Every Spy is a Prince: The Complete History of the Israeli Intelligence Community* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), p. 83.
 47. Meron Medzini, *The Proud Jewess: Golda Meir and the Vision of Israel* (Jerusalem: Edanim, 1990), p. 300 [Hebrew].
 48. Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: The Untold Story of Israeli Intelligence* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p. 188.
 49. *Washington Post* (6 July 1983); Shmuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle* (New York:

Free Press, 1988), pp. 34–6.

50. See Yossi Melman, *The C.I.A. Report on the Intelligence Services of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Erez, 1982), pp. 61–3.
51. Washington immediately protested whenever Israel made contacts with countries of the communist bloc. This was regarded by the Israelis as unnecessary interference which they bitterly resented. *Al-Hamishmar*, 15 August 1993.
52. US officials were always in favor of rapprochement between the two countries and their efforts in this direction intensified by the 1990s, when the two countries began cooperating in the military field. Meliha Altunisik, 'The Turkey-Israeli Rapprochement in the Post-Cold War Era', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 173–4.
53. Ankara, cable from Shah Muhammad Riza Pahlavi of Iran, President Iskender Mirza of Pakistan and President Celal Bayar of Turkey to Eisenhower, 16 July 1958. Eisenhower Papers, International Series, Box 44, Eisenhower Library, Albine, KS. As cited in Bishku, 'Turkey and Its Middle Eastern Neighbors', p. 62.
54. Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life* (Jerusalem: Edanim, 1976), p. 384 [Hebrew].
55. 'Participation of Israeli experts in agricultural development in Turkey', a letter sent by Yissakhar Ben-Ya'acov, Deputy Director of the Foreign Office Division of International Cooperation to the Israeli Minister in Ankara [Hebrew] (10 December 1959), in *Thirty Years of Israel's International Technical Assistance & Cooperation: Documents*, Hanan S. Aynor and Shimon Avimor (eds) (Jerusalem: Halug Society for the Transfer of Technology and The Harry S Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace—The Hebrew University, 1990), p. 344.
56. Turkey's Minister of Agriculture told an Israeli Foreign Ministry official that his country was lagging behind due to the tendency of some Turkish leaders to look toward Mecca for inspiration and that a pro-Western orientation could have been more beneficial to Turkey. See 'E. Danin reports to A. Remez, Director of the Division of International Cooperation, about his meeting with the Turkish Minister of Agriculture during his visit in Ankara' (25 November 1960) [Hebrew], Aynor and Avimor (eds), *Thirty Years*, p. 348.
57. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 15175, VR10344/1, 23 August 1960.
58. Comay to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3604/3, 26 June 1965.
59. Telegram from Israeli Consulate General in New York, ISA 3604/3, 1 October 1965.
60. Israeli Legation in Ankara to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3604/3, 1 November 1965.
61. Israel's President Zalman Shazar's sympathetic telegram to Archbishop Makarios triggered an angry response from Ankara. Moreover, Turkish officials argued that Israel failed to convince other countries to support Turkey on the Cyprus issue. Sasson to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3604/3, 17 November 1965.
62. In his conversation with the Israeli Ambassador in Paris, Ilhan Yaser, a consultant in Turkey's Embassy in Paris said, 'The entire world is aware of Nasser and his intrigues.' Almog to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3604/3, 2 November 1965.
63. In his conversation with the Israeli Minister in Ankara, the Turkish representative to the United Nations said that Turkey's relations with the Arab states would not

- harm its ties with Israel. Sasson to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3604/3, 3 November 1965.
64. Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Washington, DC, Public Affairs Press, 1955), pp. 105–14.
65. This information was apparently supplied by the Israelis as a last attempt to warn Jordan to back off. Samir A.Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 122.
66. See Omer Kurkuoglu, 'Turkey's Attitude Towards the Middle East Conflict', *Foreign Policy* (Ankara), Vol. 5, No. 4 (1976), pp. 23–33.
67. *Al-Dustur*, 9 September 1967.
68. *Pravda: The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 October 1967, p. 22.
69. *Al-Jumhuriyah*, 25 October 1967.
70. Ference A.Vali, *Bridge Across the Bosphorus* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 308.
71. Laor to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4075/21, 29 November 1967; Talmor to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4075/21, 6 December 1967; Embassy in Ankara to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4075/21, 19, 21 December 1967.
72. *Al-Amal*, 17 October 1968.
73. BBC Monitoring Services, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, ME/3587/E2/1, 15 January 1971.
74. For further details on the incident see Jacob M.Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1974), p. 45. Also, see George S.Harris, *Turkey: Coping with Crisis* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1958), p. 143.
75. At a news conference held on 26 October 1973, Defense Minister Schlesinger was asked to confirm the veracity of these claims but refused to comment. *The Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 69, No. 1795 (19 November 1973), p. 617.
76. *Le Monde*, 31 October 1973.
77. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection*.
78. Bulent Ecevit, 'Turkey's Security Policies', *Survival*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (September/October, 1978), p. 207.
79. *New York Times*, 29 July 1980.
80. *Middle East International*, No. 148 (1981), pp. 12–13.
81. *New York Times*, 3 December 1980.
82. *New York Times*, 28 August 1980.
83. Graham E.Fuller, 'Turkey's New Eastern Orientation', in *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*, Graham E.Fuller and Ian O.Lesser (eds) (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), p. 58.
84. Kenneth Meckenzie, *Turkey in Transition: The West's Neglected Ally* (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1984), p. 19.
85. *Jerusalem Post*, 21 September 1984.
86. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 9 June 1990; Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 226.
87. Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East, 1967–91: Regional Dynamic and the Superpowers* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 49.
88. Turgut Özal, 'An Unavoidable War', *The Washington Post*, 21 January 1991.
89. 'Israel Woos Turkey,' *Israeli Foreign Affairs*, June 1985.

90. *New York Times*, 15 December 1988; David Kimche, *The Last Option—After Nasser, Arafat and Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp. 295–6.
91. Kemal H.Karpat, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition 1950–1974* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1975), p. 114.
92. Suha Bolukbasi, 'Turkey Challenges Iraq and Syria: The Euphrates Dispute', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 23–5.
93. *12 September in Turkey: Before and After*, General Secretariat of the National Security Council (Ankara: Ongun Kardesler Printing House, July 1982), p. 248.
94. *Turkish Daily News*, 15 January 1990.
95. Israeli officials concurred with Cetin's statement but refrained from stating it explicitly. For example, in an interview with *Cumhuriyet*, Uri Gordon, Israel's Chargé d'Affaires in Turkey said, 'The two countries were confronted with similar threats. It does not take a lot of imagination to understand to which threats I refer' *Istanbul Cumhuriyet* in English, FBIS-NES-91–171, 4 September 1991.
96. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 November 1993.
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Ibid.*
99. Morton I.Abramovitz, 'Dateline Ankara: Turkey after Özal', *Foreign Policy*, No. 91 (Summer 1993), p. 166.
100. Greece could not become a member of the European Union without meeting its condition to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.
101. *Jerusalem Post*, 28 September 1990.
102. *Ibid.*, 23 December 1991.
103. *Yediot Aharonot*, 10 March 1993.
104. *Ha'aretz*, 12 March 1994.
105. *Ibid.*, 18 April 1993.
106. *Knesset Proceedings*, 3 November 1993.
107. *Turkey Today*, Washington, DC: Turkish Embassy (November/December 1993), pp. 1–2.
108. Hikmet Cetin, 'The Firm Anchor—Turkish Foreign Policy in Troubled Seas', *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1993), p. 25.
109. Human rights activists in Israel were also sensitive to such issues. Particularly vocal was the Israeli group Betzelem whose members often criticize Israel's practices in the occupied territories.
110. *Ha'aretz*, 28 April 1994.
111. *Turkey Today*, No. 143 (January/February 1994), p. 2 and No. 144 (March/April 1994), p. 4.
112. Amalia Van Gent, 'Turkey: Mideast Water and Islam', *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, No. 1 (January 1994), p. 21.
113. *MEED* (Middle East Business Weekly), Vol. 38, No. 36 (9 September 1994).
114. *Arab News*, 17 September 1994.
115. *Arab Times*, 17 September 1994.
116. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 12 November 1994.

117. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 November 1994.
118. *Middle East International*, No. 488, 18 November 1994, p. 5.
119. *Ha'aretz*, 6 November 1994.
120. Ankara TRT Television Network in Turkish, FBIS-NES-94-213, 3 November 1994.
121. *Turkish Times*, 15 November 1994.
122. *Turkey Today*, No. 146 (September/October 1994), p. 10.
123. *Ha'aretz*, 25, 26 January 1994; 23 October 1994; 6 November 1994; 3, 30 April 1995; 15 May 1995; *Davar*, 13 June 1995.
124. *Ha'aretz*, 10 March 1996; 30 June 1996.
125. *Al Watan al-Arabi*, 2 May 1996.
126. *Jerusalem Post*, 1 July 1996.
127. *Ibid.*, 1, 8 January 1988.
128. Aysegul Sever, 'Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks in the 1990s', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2001), p. 11.
<<http://biu.ac.il/SOS/besa/meria/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a7.html>>
129. *New York Times*, 10 May 2000.
130. *Ibid.*, 29 March 1994.
131. *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 September 1993.
132. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 November 1993.
133. *Jerusalem Post*, 9 December 1997.

2

Iran—From Tacit Cooperation to Open Hostility

Israeli-Iranian relations during the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah were characterized by discretion and pursued by both sides in a low-profile fashion. Although different in many ways, both countries saw a benefit in maintaining normal relations. Israel regarded Iran as a potential ally capable of helping it overcome its isolation in a hostile region while Iran sought to prevent Egypt from dominating the Middle East and therefore welcomed the prospect of friendship with Israel. However, forging an alliance between the two countries proved to be more complicated than both sides expected. Iran loomed large in Ben Gurion's proposed Peripheral Alliance that never materialized. The ties between the two countries remained cordial until the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79, and both sides benefited from this connection. From Israel's point of view, its tacit relationship with Iran enabled it to purchase oil that it badly needed during the early years of the state's existence. Moreover, Iran facilitated Israel's approach to Third World countries. Likewise, Tehran regarded the contact with Israel as useful in providing it with the necessary access to the United States and the countries of western Europe.

The commercial benefits of this relationship remained limited for both countries due to the geographical distance which made the cost of bypassing the hostile Arab states high; however, the geopolitical advantages were enormous for both sides. In addition, the Iranian government viewed Israel's technical expertise in agriculture and industry, particularly in the military field, as a great asset. The rise of Pan-Arabism during the 1950s and 1960s had further increased Israel's value to Iran. Threatened by Nasser's attempt to dominate the region the Iranian regime intensified its contacts with Israel without giving them publicity. This low-profile connection between the two countries survived the vicissitudes of the Arab-Israeli conflict and although it was highly criticized throughout the Arab world for its ties with the Jewish state, Iran had skillfully managed to maintain these ties until the fall of the Shah's regime. Even the subsequent Islamic regime in Iran was not oblivious to the value of connections with Israel. Despite its overt hostility toward Israel the regime of Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini adopted a pragmatic approach leaving considerable room for contacts between the two countries.

Khomeini's death and the rise of Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini and President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani as leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1989 did little to promote normalization between the two countries. Iran's policy in the region remained similar to the one pursued by the Khomeini regime. Despite the relatively cautious policy pursued by the new regime the bilateral relations had suffered a serious setback not only as a result of Tehran's plan to obtain nuclear weapons but also because of its support of the Hizbollah in southern Lebanon. Yet the commercial ties between the two countries were never completely severed. Rafsanjani's regime continued to pursue a pragmatic

course of action and the anti-Israeli rhetoric that characterized Iran's policy during the 1980s has abated considerably. Despite Israel's hope that President Muhammad Khatami, who came to power in August 1997, would move toward normalization no significant change occurred. Officially, the Iranian regime continued to use the anti-Zionist card in order to promote its interests in the region. However, its approach remained highly pragmatic. In order to understand the nature of the bilateral relations it is necessary to trace their origin to the early days of the Jewish state's existence.

How to approach Iran was a question that officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were trying to grapple with from the early days of the state's existence. In those early days, when the State of Israel was in its infancy and had not yet acquired the technical expertise and the connections that later turned it into an attractive ally, it seemed that there was little that could be done to promote better relations with Tehran. One of the first ideas proposed by Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem in order to win Iran's good will was to exploit its conflict with Iraq. Several documents found in the Israel State Archives shed light on Israel's attempts to approach Iran by taking advantage of its border conflict with Iraq. In a letter to Eban, a senior Foreign Ministry official, Ya'acov Shimoni who heard this idea from one of his employees writes,

Dr Pines is asking whether it is not worthwhile for us to let the Iranians know that in the border conflict between them and Iraq, and in any other issue outstanding between them and another Arab state they could count on our moral and political support. For example, in the United Nations, after we become a member in that organization.

However, Shimoni was not oblivious to the dangerous implications of such step. He said, 'The Iranians...might interpret this as a Zionist plot.'¹

Iran's official position during Israel's War of Independence was decidedly pro-Arab. Statements made by the Iranian press were highly critical of Israel and the Jews were depicted as conquerors who forcefully evicted the Palestinian Arabs from their homeland.² Undeterred by Tehran's show of solidarity with the Arabs, the Israeli government made serious attempts to improve relations with the Shah's regime and in the autumn of 1948 it granted Iran's representative, Abbas Seyghal, the status of a Consul General of Iran in Israel. The Iranians, however, did not respond to Israel's request that its representative be granted a similar status in Tehran.³ However, the Israelis did not abandon their efforts to strengthen the ties with Iran. Foreign Minister Sharett promised his Iranian counterpart, Ali Asghar Hikmet, that his government would protect all Iranian nationals living in Israel and expressed his desire to establish normal relations between the two countries in the near future.⁴

On 15 March 1950, the Iranian government announced its decision to grant de facto recognition to the State of Israel.⁵ A senior Iranian official expressed the view common in the Foreign Ministry at that time saying, 'It is in Persia's interests to encourage the development of Israel as a counter-weight to the Arab states who have frequently acted in a manner hostile to Persia.' The same source said that his country resented the fact that the Arabs did not keep it informed regarding their dealings with Israel.⁶ The decision to grant Israel recognition was by no means acceptable to all Iranian officials. Opposition to

the government's decision came from many quarters. For example, Iran's former Foreign Minister argued that in deference to public opinion in the Arab world Iran should withdraw its recognition.⁷ In addition, the Iranian press was highly critical of the decision. Some newspapers claimed that Israel had paid for that recognition, while others argued that this step was part of a grand Iranian scheme designed to form an alliance with Israel and Jordan against Egypt and Syria.⁸ The Arab states lashed out against Iran's decision, calling it 'a stab in the back' and 'a shameful betrayal' of the Arab cause. In response, Iran's Foreign Minister argued that Arab criticism against Iran was utterly unjustified since the Arabs themselves had already negotiated with Israel at Rhodes, thereby granting it recognition. Iran's decision to recognize Israel was partially a result of pressure exerted by some 20,000 Iranian subjects living in Israel at that time. Recognizing the need to protect its subjects, Tehran granted recognition to Israel. Commercial reasons played an important role, as well, since Israel had already become an important purchaser of Iranian goods.⁹ In addition, Israel's technical assistance was enthusiastically received by the Iranians because the Israeli experts managed to apply their experience to Iran's needs with remarkable effectiveness.¹⁰ Yet the bilateral relations continued to be marred by Iran's claims to territory which its absentee nationals had in Israel. In June 1950, Iran threatened that if Israel did not allow its nationals to return to Israel an equivalent number of Jews would be evicted from Iran. Moreover, Iranian officials expressed disappointment in their meetings with their Israeli counterparts, arguing that they refused to extradite fugitive Jews to Iraq and that they assisted many Russian Jews in their attempt to immigrate to Israel.¹¹

Israel's efforts to strengthen the bilateral relations by capitalizing on Iran's resentment against the Arab states continued throughout the entire period of the Shah's reign. In the autumn of 1950, the Arab delegates in Lake Success opposed the candidacy of an Iranian diplomat as President of the Assembly.¹² Again, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials regarded this as an opportunity to improve relations with Tehran.¹³ In his letter to the Foreign Ministry one official recommended that this incident be exploited to the full. According to the Iraqi Military Attaché, Director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry Shmuel Divon arrived in Tehran in September 1950, and offered the Iranian government a sum of £3 million in return for full recognition of the Jewish state. The Iraqi attaché stated that he did not know what the Iranian response was. He informed the Iraqi government regarding the Israeli efforts and called upon it to prevent the flight of Jews from Iraq to Iran.¹⁴

In July 1951, the bilateral relations began deteriorating. The Consulate General of Iran in Jerusalem was closed by the order of the Iranian government and Iran's representative, Reza Safinia, was ordered to leave Jerusalem. This decision came apparently as a result of a promise made by Egypt that its representative would support Iran at the Hague International Court. In addition, the Arab states promised to support Iran in its oil dispute with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.¹⁵ Confronted by Israel and asked to explain the reason for this step, the Iranian government argued that the closure of the consulate was a consequence of budget constraints.¹⁶ Officials in the British Embassy in Tehran offered another explanation for the sudden Iranian move. One of them writes, 'For what it is worth, we think this sudden move by the Persians was mainly dictated by their anxiety to please the Iraqis, in the hope of inducing them to prevent British troops and warships

from using Iraqi territory and territorial waters.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Iranian government did not wish to sever its relations with Israel and did not yield to Arab pressure to withdraw its de facto recognition. Shortly after the oil dispute, Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq turned to a representative of Bank Igud Le Yisrael asking him about the possibility of transferring funds to Iranian Jews living in Israel. The latter sought an amicable solution and suggested that commercial ties between the two countries be established. Consequently, a 'clearing' agreement of US\$500,000 was signed between the national banks of Iran and Israel.¹⁸

Israel's attempts to normalize relations with Iran were pursued with greater vigor during the Mossadeq era. Israeli officials continued to pressure Iran to grant Israel de jure recognition. However, pressured by nationalist and militant religious groups within the Majlis who were led by the vocal pro-Arab Speaker Ayatollah Kashani, Mossadeq's government was in no position to upgrade its relations with Israel.

The fall of Mossadeq in August 1953 led to a slight improvement in the bilateral relations. In one of his letters to the Foreign Ministry, Israel's Military Attaché, Chaim Herzog had written that he was not invited to parties in the Iranian Embassy during the Mossadeq era. That policy changed after Mossadeq's fall and in December 1953 he was invited to celebrate Iran's Armed Forces Day.¹⁹ The commercial ties between the two countries improved as well. However, Tehran refrained from sending a representative to Tel Aviv, preferring instead to maintain contact with Israel through the Swiss Embassy. In addition, an Iranian consul was assigned to Tel Aviv and the head of the Israeli commercial mission in Tehran served also as an unofficial ambassador.

Arab pressure on Iran to refrain from normalizing relations with Israel was unrelenting. In the summer of 1954, the Secretary General of the Islamic Council in Jerusalem appealed to the Shah to preserve Muslim unity and 'not to commit the greatest crime possible against Islam by recognizing Israel'.²⁰ In addition, the Arabs decided to coordinate their efforts in order to dissuade Iran from selling oil to Israel. However, despite its pro-Arab statements the Iranian government did not comply with Arab demands to stop the oil shipments to Israel. Nor did it respond to the Arab League's demand to deny Israeli planes the right to land in Iran.²¹ Instead of adopting an anti-Israeli policy the Iranian government sought to satisfy Arab demands by agreeing to act as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a meeting with members of the Baghdad Pact in January 1956, Iran's Prime Minister said that in order to satisfy the Arabs' demand his country was willing to mediate in their conflict with Israel.²² Reacting to Israel's request to establish diplomatic relations Tehran adopted a delaying tactic. In his meeting with the Israeli minister in Ankara in the autumn of 1956, Iran's Ambassador Ali Mansour said that his government decided that this was not the appropriate time to renew diplomatic relations with Israel but promised to reconsider the issue in the future.²³

In September 1956, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials expressed their concern regarding the deterioration in the bilateral relations. According to these officials the Iranian government was compelled to reassess its policy toward the Middle East due to the propaganda and the unrelenting assaults of the Egyptian press on the Shah, who visited Turkey during the Suez Affair. Israeli officials believed that the presence of more than 40,000 Iranian Jews in Israel constituted a strong incentive for better relations between the two countries. However, from Tehran's point of view, there were more compelling

reasons for turning down Israel's request: the Arab world was uniting behind Nasser; the tension between Egypt and the West was mounting and the Arab-Israeli conflict reached one of its climaxes. All these factors indicated that any attempt to establish closer ties with Israel could be interpreted as an anti-Arab move and expose the Iranian regime to fierce criticism by Nasser. At the same time, however, Tehran did not let itself be overwhelmed by the anti-Israeli sentiment that swept the Arab world during the Suez Affair. Israeli diplomats intensified their efforts to gain Iran's good will by contacting the Shah's aides and confidants. A meeting between Israeli officials and the Iranian Prime Minister was arranged with the Shah's knowledge. The Iranians agreed to promote the commercial and cultural ties between the two countries and raised the possibility of establishing diplomatic or at least consular relations. In order to expedite this issue, Israel's Ambassador in London, Eliahu Eilat received instructions from Jerusalem to coordinate his efforts with those of other Israeli diplomats in Western capitals.²⁴

Israel's complicity in the Suez Affair of 1956 and its invasion of the Sinai Peninsula had further intensified anti-Western and anti-Israeli sentiment in the region. From Tehran's point of view the time was not appropriate for upgrading relations with Israel. Nasser's growing popularity following the withdrawal of Israel and the Western powers from Egyptian soil had provided an additional boost to the Pan-Arab sentiment, which seemed to threaten Iran. The Iranian government sought to maintain good relations with Israel but feared that overt relations could turn it into a target of criticism from the entire Muslim world.²⁵ Nevertheless, Iran's attitude toward Israel changed for the better. This was largely due to what Tehran saw as renewed Iraqi intransigence. In a letter to his comrades in the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador in Tehran explained why Iran felt somewhat more free to approach Israel by the end of the 1950s. He writes:

Iran, as you know, has no Jewish complex, either national, racial or religious. On the contrary, on the rebound from traditional dislike of the Arabs, the Iranians are inclined rather to be friendly to the Israelis. It was not for any basic purpose of her own but purely as a gesture of solidarity with the Arabs that Iran has hitherto refrained from relations with Israel...but now that Iraq has left the Baghdad Pact and is on practically every front behaving with marked unfriendliness towards Iran, the Iranian Government have no particular reason to continue this appeasement.²⁶

Although Israel continued to pressure the Shah to establish diplomatic relations he refrained from making any binding statements. Pressured to say whether Iran's de facto recognition was still in effect the Shah said, in July 1960, that it was never withdrawn in the first place. This was interpreted by the Arab press as a renewal of diplomatic ties. A spokesman for the Arab League said that Iran's recognition of Israel was a grave matter that would have dire consequences.²⁷ Egyptian reaction was swift and critical. Iran was blamed for its efforts to enhance Israel's position in the region at the expense of the Palestinians. Press reports on secret exchange of information between Iranian and Israeli secret services began to circulate in the Egyptian and the European press.²⁸ Meanwhile, Ben Gurion's plan for a peripheral alliance was beginning to take shape. Contacts had already been made with Ethiopia and Turkey and Ben Gurion was planning to complete

the encirclement of Israel's neighboring hostile Arab countries by incorporating Iran into his proposed alliance. In what was described by Israeli sources as 'an emergency landing' a plane carrying Ben Gurion arrived in Tehran, where Ben Gurion, accompanied by several experts in various fields, met the Iranian Prime Minister Ali Amini and conducted negotiations with him regarding the conclusion of a military pact between the two countries,²⁹ a pact which the two countries had been planning to sign since the summer of 1960. The meeting was kept secret and news regarding its content was denied by both sides.³⁰ Egyptian sources later revealed that Ben Gurion met the Iranian Prime Minister in Tehran and that the two discussed issues pertaining to the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) as well as cooperation in economic and military fields. A Foreign Ministry spokesman in Tel Aviv refused to comment on the meeting, but confirmed that Ben Gurion had met Iranian government officials.³¹ By the beginning of 1962, foreign press reports were commenting on secret military deals between Israel and Iran.³² Yet, despite these contacts, Iran was still reluctant to grant *de jure* recognition to Israel. Amini admitted that Iran's reluctance to grant this was a consequence of its desire to maintain cordial relations with the Arab states. At the same time, however, he stated that the Arab states had never provided assistance to Iran and therefore had no right to criticize.³³ In a conversation between the Israeli Ambassador in Copenhagen and Denmark's Prime Minister Viggo Kampmann the latter said that he questioned Amini regarding the state of Israeli-Iranian relations and was told that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel was just a matter of time and that it was delayed merely as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁴

It was clear that Tehran's orientation remained pro-Israeli despite its reluctance to come out with official statements. Speeches made by Iranian officials in reaction to anti-Iranian criticism made by Nasser were replete with anti-Egyptian and anti-Arab sentiment. In a conversation with a member of the Israeli Legation in Tehran, Amini said that Nasser was an adventurer, a despot and a demagogue who thrived on publicity and whose main objective was to undermine the moderate regimes in the Middle East. The Iranians had often complained that whereas the Arabs tended to attack Iran for conducting secret negotiations with Israel they refrained from criticizing Turkey for doing the same. However, despite their criticism of the Arabs, Iranian ministers maintained a low profile and implored their Israeli counterparts not to publicize these contacts.³⁵ Indeed, the Iranians had reason to be concerned because there was much substance in the bilateral relations. The reports about military cooperation became more frequent in the summer of 1963. There was not only contact between the high-ranking officials of both countries but also discussions about the sale of Iranian tanks to Israel, and the negotiations were marked by exceptional intensity. The impression of British Embassy officials in Tel Aviv was that the Israelis wanted to seize the opportunity to capitalize on the Shah's intense fear of Nasser and to expand the bilateral cooperation. What prevented the Iranians from approaching Israel more aggressively was their fear of alienating Muslims throughout the world and in Iran in particular.³⁶ Responding to pressure exerted by the Israeli representative to establish full diplomatic relations, the Iranian Ambassador argued that this would be a drastic step which might cause difficulties with Iraq and lead to the interruption of oil exports from Shat al-Arab.³⁷ Aware of Iran's sensitivity to Arab public opinion, the Israelis thought it prudent to avoid

capitalizing on the Shah's differences with the Arab states, and realizing that any attempt to win Tehran's good will by impairing Iran's relations with the Arab states would backfire, the Israeli Foreign Ministry abandoned this approach. Herzog told the British Ambassador in Tel Aviv that Israel had no intention of causing intrigue or damaging Iran's relations with the Arab states.³⁸

Criticism of Iran's ties with Israel came from Egypt as well as Syria. When Iran decided to withdraw its ambassador from Damascus after Syria's Prime Minister asserted that Khuzistan was an Arab province, the Syrian newspaper *Al-Ba'th* stated that this action was a result of Israeli-Iranian collaboration.³⁹ Criticism of Iran's cautious policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict came from within Iran as well, with left-wing as well as right-wing groups condemning the government's ties with Israel. Yet with all the criticism Iran did not sever its ties with Israel; only the official anti-Israeli rhetoric changed. Following the Six Day War, Iran joined the chorus of many countries, which insisted that Israel comply with UN Resolution 242 demanding withdrawal from all occupied territories and the restoration of Palestinian rights. The Iranian Ambassador to the United States, Hushang Ansary said that while Iran recognized Israel's right to exist it condemned its occupation of Arab land.⁴⁰ Not only did the Shah avoid alienating Nasser but also took steps to improve his relations with him.⁴¹ The Iranian Foreign Minister told his Israeli counterpart that direct negotiations with the Arab states were not necessarily the proper method of solving the conflict,⁴² yet Tehran did not decide on drastic anti-Israeli measures and the commercial contacts continued.

In February 1973, Iran joined the Soviet Union in urging Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, but at the same time it began exchanging military data with Israel. According to a *Newsweek* report from the summer of 1973, Israel, the United States and Iran exchanged military data. The famous journalist Arnaud De Borchgrave quoted the Shah as saying that hundreds of Iranian officers had been in Israel for advanced training. He also argued that Iran supplied Israel with most of its oil and provided naval protection for Israeli tankers in the Persian Gulf. An IDF spokesman flatly denied the report, saying that it was totally unfounded, and Iranian official sources issued a similar denial. However, the evidence indicating that the two countries were cooperating in many areas was overwhelming.

Statements made by Iranian government officials clearly indicated that Iran was attempting to pacify the Arab states without alienating Israel. In an interview with the newspaper *Action*, Iran's Prime Minister Abbas Hoveyda said, 'We need Arab friendship. It is clear to us, but it is not indispensable for us. The opposite of course, is true too... One has to remember the Shah's statement made after the Six Day War: The time has passed when one could abusively occupy sovereign territories. This remains still one of the basic principles of our foreign policy'.⁴³ However, despite frequent expressions of sympathy for the Arabs, the Shah's regime was still unwilling to take active measures against Israel. When the Arabs decided to use the oil embargo against the United States in an attempt to force it to alter its Middle East policy the Shah stated explicitly that Iran would not be part of such a campaign.⁴⁴

One of the reasons for the Shah's reluctance to adopt anti-US and anti-Israeli measures was Iran's increasing volume of trade with these countries. The total value of Israeli exports to Iran, which amounted to US\$33 million during 1973-74, increased to US\$230

million during 1977–78. However, although Iran supplied 60 percent of its oil, Israel's prime interest remained geopolitical—it regarded Iran as a bulwark against Soviet penetration toward the Middle East. Similarly, the Shah did not wish to see the Arabs become overwhelmingly strong in the region. He discouraged them from using oil as a political tool and although he allowed Soviet aircraft to overfly his territory during the Yom Kippur War he limited their number.

By the end of 1974, Iran intensified its contacts with Egypt as part of an effort to improve relations with the moderate Arab states. At the same time, the Shah flatly denied rumors that Iran would be ready to fight alongside the Arabs. He continuously portrayed an image of a peacemaker by trying to convince Israel to withdraw from all occupied territories, even promising to replace any oil that Israel might lose as a result of evacuating the oilfields of Abu Rudeis. He also agreed to send Iranian troops to replace the Peruvian soldiers who had participated in the peacekeeping force stationed on the Golan Heights.

In an interview with the Iranian Resurgence Party newspaper *Rastakhiz*, the Shah said that Israel's occupation policy was unwise because it defied UN resolutions and contradicted 'logic and wisdom'. He added that since the Arabs had moderated their stand toward the Jewish state, 'there is no reason why Israel should continue the occupation of Arab territories'.⁴⁵ On another occasion he said that as a UN member, Israel's existence must be recognized; that the Rabat conference did not necessarily foreclose Jordan as a representative of the Palestinian people; that the Palestinian question must be resolved before the Middle East problem could be resolved; and that Iran did not recognize the Israeli occupation. He added that all lands occupied by Israel should be returned but argued that it was not clear to whom. As for the Palestinians, he said that they were entitled to their own state and that Palestine should become a UN member in the same manner that Israel was. Moreover, as a gesture of solidarity with the Arabs, the Shah went along with the UN decision equating Zionism with racism. The Shah was later quoted in a Saudi newspaper as saying that the Arabs should recognize Israel in return for a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories. However, at a CENTO meeting in May 1976, Iran's Foreign Minister, Ali Khalatbari attacked Israel for its intransigence and praised what he described as the 'conciliatory Arab attitude'.⁴⁶ In an interview with Mike Wallace of CBC News the Shah stated that the Jewish lobby in the United States was too powerful and that it sometimes harmed Israel's interests.⁴⁷ However, despite these critical remarks, which were meant to pacify Arab critics, the bilateral relations were not adversely affected. Iran continued to be one of Israel's best markets for many agricultural and industrial products, including military hardware. The Israeli navigation company ZIM started a service from Eilat to the Persian Gulf. In addition, Israel built a desalination plant in the Gulf and helped Iran purchase tanks from Great Britain, yet major disagreements remained between the two countries. Iran remained opposed to Israeli building projects in east Jerusalem and insisted that Israel must be prepared to gamble for peace.⁴⁸ As it turned out, Iran's carefully calculated tightrope-walking policy failed. By the late 1970s the Shah's opponents were able to utilize his connections to Israel with great effect, thereby causing his downfall.

By the end of 1977 there were indications that the Iranian regime was under serious threat. In December, Dayan visited Iran in his capacity as Defense Minister. The official

government announcements were that Dayan was seeking Iranian mediation in the Israeli—Egyptian peace negotiations. However, the meeting's purpose was much more ambitious than was reported by the press—Dayan was seeking a closer relationship with Iran. Although the Shah was sympathetic to his Israeli guest during the debate over the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict he insisted that the West Bank belonged to Jordan.

Ironically, the state of the bilateral relations in late 1977 acted as a catalyst leading to the Camp David accords. By then it had become abundantly clear that Ben Gurion's scheme for a peripheral alliance was no longer a realistic possibility. Naphtali Lau-Lavie, who accompanied Dayan on his mission to Iran, recalled: 'We returned with the feeling that the external circle around Israel, which according to Ben Gurion included Turkey in the north, Iran in the east and Ethiopia in the south, was already hopelessly broken.' He also explained that the newly established Marxist regime in Ethiopia had alienated itself from Israel; that Turkey came closer to the European Community and that Iran was losing its strategic significance. Therefore, he said, 'We felt the urgent need to strive toward understanding with Egypt, and to try to break the great hostility barrier with the largest of the Arab nations.'⁴⁹ Further Israeli attempts to approach Iran were made in the early part of 1978, when Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin visited the Shah, who insisted that the visit remain secret. During that visit, the Shah praised Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for his peace initiative and urged Begin to show more flexibility in the negotiations. Begin emerged from the meeting saying that significant progress had been made.⁵⁰

By the end of January 1978 there were reports that Iran was considering an oil embargo against Israel in the event of a stalemate in the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. The Shah later moderated his stand by saying that he might be willing to impose an oil embargo on Israel as part of overall international sanctions aimed at persuading Israel to show more flexibility in the negotiations. However, in an interview to the press he moderated his stand even further saying that he saw no reason to impose an oil embargo on Israel despite the stalemate. He added, 'If the United States wants Iran to halt the flow of oil, then it must first stop the arms supply to the Israeli enemy.'⁵¹ The anti-Shah disturbances in Iran led to harsh criticism in Israel regarding the government's willingness to return the Sinai oilfields to Egypt. Critics argued that this could lead to greater dependence on Iranian oil. Indeed, Israel came close to not signing an agreement with Egypt for fear of losing the oilfields of Abu Rudeis; only Egypt's promise to supply part of Israel's oil needs saved the negotiations from collapse.⁵²

The events in Iran during the summer of 1978 were disquieting for Israel not only because the future of the bilateral relations was uncertain but also because there was great concern for the fate of the Jewish community there. The unrest in Iran was accompanied by a fierce anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli campaign that culminated in the downfall of the Shah.⁵³ This event was a major setback to Israel not only due to the militant nature of the new regime but also due to the fact that its cooperation in major industrial projects had come to an abrupt halt. For example, a joint Israeli-Iranian project to build an industrial infrastructure in the Gulf region had to be scrapped due to the fall of the Shah's regime.

Khomeini's anti-Israeli campaign started while he was still in exile in Paris. He blamed Israel for trying to suppress the revolution and for causing unrest among the Iranian oil workers. By 1979, Israel suspended all exports to Iran and the Solel Boneh construction

company ceased all its operations. The new Iranian regime had quickly adopted several anti-Israeli measures: it pulled its combat battalion from the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon; pressured by anti-Shah opposition, Iranian Prime Minister Shapur Bakhtiar told the 268-member Majlis that his government would cut off oil supplies to Israel and South Africa; and, in what proved to be a greater turning point in the bilateral relations, Khomeini's loyalists raided the Israeli legation and converted it into a PLO office.

Reports that Israel provided refuge to Iranian officers loyal to the Shah intensified the hostility of the new regime toward Israel. In January 1979, Egyptian sources argued that a large number of senior Iranian officers who were involved in 'brutal acts against the Iranian people' found refuge in Israel.⁵⁴ On 18 February 1979, the revolutionary government announced its decision to sever diplomatic relations with Israel. At the same time, Arafat was received by Khomeini, who expressed sympathy for the Palestinians and pledged to support their struggle against Israel.⁵⁵ By championing the cause of the Palestinians the new regime sought not only to express its hostility toward Israel but also to compensate the PLO for its assistance to the Iranian revolutionaries who fought the Shah's regime prior to the revolution.⁵⁶

Khomeini's reaction to the Camp David accords was negative from the beginning—he denounced both Israel and Egypt. The attacks on Israel were unrelenting and the Jewish community was under close observation by the new regime. In the spring of 1979, Jewish community leader Habibullah Elghanian was executed. Israel was denounced for supplying arms to the Kurds and Iran's President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr stated that his country would fight alongside the Arabs in the event of war with Israel. He told the PLO weekly *Falastine al-Thawra*, 'It is natural to fight alongside the Arabs when we finish the reformation of our armed forces in a more efficient way.'⁵⁷

When the Fez resolutions regarding the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were passed in September 1982, the Iranian Foreign Ministry denounced them as an 'example of collaboration between Zionism and the reactionary Arab states' and said that the Palestinian question could 'only be saved by amputating this cancerous tumour called Israel from the region'.⁵⁸ Yet at the same time reports regarding Israel's arms sales to Iran were beginning to circulate and media sources claimed that these were carried out with Washington's approval.⁵⁹ Such claims persisted throughout the early part of the decade. A report that appeared in the summer of 1981 in the *Cyprus Weekly* argued that Larnaka airport was used to transfer Israeli arms to Iran. Another report which appeared in the *Sunday Times* argued that Israel supplied 360 tons of tank spare parts and ammunition on a plane chartered in Buenos Aires. The plane was returning from Tehran to Israel after a third delivery flight when it was intercepted by Soviet fighters on the Soviet-Turkish border and crashed. Officials in Tehran dismissed the report as a 'fairy tale' and a lie.⁶⁰ According to another report by the *New York Times* from 18 March 1982, Israeli officials admitted that arms had indeed been transferred to Iran. An Israeli who then returned from Tehran argued that Khomeini approved of the arms deal.⁶¹ Then in the summer of 1983, a French newspaper published photocopies of contracts providing for the sale of US\$135 million-worth of missiles and shells to Iran.⁶² A similar report appeared in *Time* magazine. Initially, the reports were dismissed as rumors by the countries involved, but the frequency with which these reports appeared in the foreign

press embarrassed both governments whose officials were compelled to admit that arms transfers had taken place. For example, in one of his interviews to the foreign press, Defense Minister Moshe Arens admitted that Israel supplied arms to Iran following the American hostage crisis in January 1981. Their aim, he said was 'to see if we could not find some areas of contact with the Iranian military, to bring down the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini'.⁶³ For the most part, right-wing Likud politicians approved of the arms sales as a necessary measure designed to protect Israel's interests. Later, former General Ariel Sharon publicly stated that Israel had sold arms to Iran in small quantities, although the Israeli government continued to deny that such sales were ever made.

The lack of consensus in Israel regarding these sales was obvious from the beginning. Eban was among several moderate politicians who criticized the government for selling weapons to Iran, but the sales continued. In the spring of 1984 the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that Prime Minister Helmut Kohl complained in Washington about Israeli arms supplies to Iran totaling US\$500 million and a Swiss spokesman argued that his country's embassy has been used for the meeting between representatives of Iran and Israel who came to discuss arms deals. A similar claim was made by the Iranian opposition group called the People's Mujahedeen Organization.⁶⁴

Iran's attitude toward Israel remained hostile despite the arms deal. In the autumn of 1984, the General Assembly had voted to reject Iran's motion to expel Israel from the United Nations. During the debate, the Iranian delegate accused Israel of atrocities committed at Deir Yassin and Sabra and Shatila, referring to these events as 'genocide and massacres' and saying that they contradicted UN values. Israel's Ambassador Benjamin Netanyahu expressed satisfaction over the rejection of the proposal, which he termed 'preposterous'.⁶⁵

In the autumn of 1984, a British source revealed that the Israeli-Iranian arms deal came to an end because Israel had run out of the spare parts which Iran needed; however, other sources insisted that the sales did not cease.⁶⁶ Moreover, there were reports that the two countries were still collaborating on 'Project Flower' which began in July 1977 and involved the construction of an Israeli nuclear missile, which Iran agreed to help finance.⁶⁷ Sources in Washington stated that Israel sent a shipment of arms to Iran in 1985 and that the Israelis were the ones who suggested that the President make contacts with Iran.⁶⁸ Reports regarding the transfer of Israeli arms to Iran persisted throughout 1986.⁶⁹ Five men charged with attempting to sell US\$2.5 billion-worth of arms to Iran were arrested in Bermuda, and others were arrested in New York on the same charge. Again, the Israeli government denied the accusation despite overwhelming evidence. In the spring of 1986, the *New York Times* provided another report which revealed the magnitude of the arms deal, with the writer claiming that Israel was involved in a multibillion dollar project to modify advanced surface-to-surface missiles for sale to Iran.⁷⁰ Again, in the summer of that year, the German weekly *Stern* claimed that the Israeli government was behind an attempted US\$82 million arms deal with Iran which did not materialize because the dealers were arrested.

Later, officials in Jerusalem explained that the American hostage crisis led to greater Israeli involvement in supplying arms to Iran. Israel's cooperation in this affair was approved by Peres who was convinced that Israel should comply with the American request. He told former Foreign Ministry General Director David Kimche, 'We owe the

Americans so much that we have to do our utmost to help them; especially as they have come to us to seek our help.⁷¹ When details about this affair began to leak out, Peres found it necessary to defend the arms deal in the Knesset and in response to his left-wing critics he said that Israel had an obligation to help the United States in the crisis and that no profits were made from the deal.⁷² According to *Time* magazine Israel funneled US\$40 million-worth of US military hardware to Iran during 1986, yet Prime Minister Shamir argued that Israel had no connection to the Contras in Nicaragua and said, 'It is not our policy to sell arms to Iran.'⁷³ However, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry seemed more willing to provide details regarding the arms deal. Kimche confirmed Israel's contacts with Iranian officials regarding the arms deal, and he, together with the Israeli businessman Ya'acov Nimrodi, stressed that the main motive behind this move was to encourage the pro-Western circles in Tehran.⁷⁴ The Reagan Administration had known since 1981 that Israel was selling arms to Iran. A former Reagan aide said about this affair, 'It was so routine I did not think twice about it. It was pretty clear that all the key players knew.'⁷⁵ Israel regarded the arms deal not only as a way to improve its relations with the United States but also to facilitate the immigration of Iranian Jews to Israel. Representatives from Israel and Iran met secretly in Europe in the autumn of 1987, to discuss a plan for increasing Jewish immigration from Iran in return for Israeli military assistance. According to one report, 25,000 Jews were allowed to leave Iran within six months. Peres had flatly denied the report and, at a formal dinner with Mustafa Khalil of Egypt, he said that Israel would never compromise with Khomeini's Iran since 'we cannot imagine ourselves as an island of democracy in an ocean of fundamentalism'⁷⁶

Despite the arms deal, Iran's verbal attacks against Israel continued relentlessly throughout the entire period. Tehran went as far as agreeing to pay other countries to expel Israel and the United States from all international organizations. Iranian embassies were reported to have distributed excerpts from the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁷⁷ Moreover, Iran's aid to the Hizbollah in southern Lebanon continued despite the organization's involvement against the IDF in the Security Zone and its bombardment of Israeli settlements in the north. However, despite the anti-Israeli measures and the hostile statements made by Iranian leaders, both sides remained interested in closer cooperation in defense matters. According to Iran's Deputy Defense Minister General Hasan Tufanian, who was in charge of supplying the Iranian army, both countries were concerned about the threat posed by Iraqi Scud missiles. The Carter Administration's refusal to sell Lance missiles to Iran and to provide Israel with similar defense means were the main incentives leading the two countries to sign a treaty of cooperation the main purpose of which was to develop a long-range surface-to-surface missile.⁷⁸

Additional reports and testimonies published in 1987 by persons who had first-hand information about the arms sale, or were directly involved in it, were no longer possible to deny. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Nimrodi stated that in 1985 Israel approved the sale of US\$50 million-worth of arms to Iran. According to Nimrodi, the approval was given two months before Washington asked Israel to help establish contact with Tehran. However, the deal was not carried out because the Iranians sought anti-tank missiles from the United States and not Israeli arms.⁷⁹

Reports regarding Iran's plans to build a nuclear bomb constituted another turning point in the bilateral relations. Tehran responded by denying the veracity of all such

claims, while at the same time relentlessly continuing its verbal attacks against Israel. The Israelis responded to the Iranian threat with threats of their own. In the spring of 1984, Science and Development Minister Yuval Ne'eman hinted that Israel had the capacity to bomb Iran to stop it from committing a holocaust.⁸⁰ The anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist rhetoric reached such proportions that all those considered Iran's enemies, even the Iraqi Ba'th Party were branded Zionist by the Khomeini regime. A communiqué issued in the early part of 1983 by the Iranian armed forces and the Revolutionary Guards referred to the Iraqi army and ruling elite as 'the forces of the Zionist Ba'athist regime' and the 'Zionist rulers of Baghdad'.⁸¹

The bilateral relations did not change significantly when Rafsanjani became Iran's President, although the new regime's anti-Israeli rhetoric did alter slightly. Unlike Khomeini, it refrained from excessively harsh statements. In an interview with *Der Spiegel* of Hamburg, in the spring of 1991, when asked whether Iran was planning to go to war with Israel, Rafsanjani's response was: 'Such question does not exist at present, but it might become inevitable in the future.' And when the interviewer asked, 'If Israel intervened in the recent war, would Iran abandon its policy of neutrality and join the war?' Rafsanjani replied: 'Since this did not happen, talk about it is unwarranted and useless... When such a day comes Iran will decide on the possibility of its participation in the war, but what is definite, Iran will not recognize Israel's existence. All Palestinians expelled from their territories must go back there and enjoy deciding on their own future.'⁸²

Rafsanjani's official policy statements mentioned Iran's desire to maintain cordial relations with all governments, except for Israel and South Africa. The Iranian government stated that it would not accept any type of negotiations with Israel and it intensified its efforts to prevent the holding of an international conference to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Khomeini said, 'The issue of Palestine concerns the Palestinian and other Muslim nations and the US has no right to dictate its wishes to others as a custodian and a man of authority.'⁸³

The rapprochement between Israel and Turkey, which culminated in the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries, provoked heavy criticism from Tehran. Rafsanjani's regime attributed Turkey's rapprochement with Israel to the rise of Prime Minister Demirel and the waning power of President Özal.⁸⁴ The Israeli-Turkish rapprochement involved military cooperation between the two countries and was therefore regarded as a menace by the Iranians. According to the journalist Ibrahim al-Hamidi, who was known for his intimate contacts with the Syrian government, Iran reacted by offering Syria an alliance as a counterweight to the Israeli-Turkish alliance.⁸⁵ Officials in Tehran stated that they regarded the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement as an event of serious consequence to Iran and as a hostile act aimed at curbing Iranian influence in the region. Likewise, Iran was highly critical of the leaders of the Muslim states of Central Asia for their decision to establish ties with Israel. The most heavily criticized was Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov who met Peres in the summer of 1994. Karimov was blamed for brutally suppressing the democratic and Islamic forces in Uzbekistan in order to consolidate his autocratic regime. Likewise, Azerbaijan's leader, Abulfaz Elchibey, was severely criticized in the Iranian press. Iranian leaders often referred to him as a Turkish and a Zionist agent.⁸⁶ With the exception of Turkmenistan

whose relations with Iran remained cordial, all the Muslim republics were denounced for their contacts with Israel. Tehran Radio was also highly critical of Egypt, its role in the peace process and its suppression of the Muslims. In a speech to pilgrims on a Hajj to Mecca, Khomeini called Israel a 'fictitious' nation lacking historical connection to Palestine. He condemned the peace process, arguing that Israel achieved recognition by the Arab states, giving nothing in return.⁸⁷

Tehran's goals as explained by Iranian observers were threefold: to intimidate Israel into greater violence in order to attract international public opinion; to disrupt the Arab-Israeli peace talks which Iran regarded as a conspiracy and as an Israeli attempt to obtain official recognition for the occupation of Palestine; and to attract UN attention to the struggle of the Palestinians for their homeland. In response to the charge that Iran was supporting the activities of militant Islamic organizations, Tehran's reaction was that although Iran supported these movements it did not create them. In his meeting with Syrian Vice President Abdel-Halim Khaddam, Rafsanjani said that negotiations with Israel would achieve nothing and that the main issue was the restoration of Palestinian rights. Tehran continued to lash out at Israel on every occasion, blaming it for spreading rumors regarding Iran's violation of human rights and its secret arms deals with foreign countries. Furthermore, it criticized Israel's unwillingness to cooperate with the effort to establish a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. Seeking to reject the accusation regarding its complicity in the first terrorist bombing at New York's World Trade Center, Tehran argued that the plan was conceived and carried out by Israeli agents.⁸⁸

Although the Iranian government championed the cause of the Palestinians, relations between Iran and the PLO were far from smooth. Tehran's attempts to support the militant groups within the Palestinian camp were not to the liking of Arafat who blamed the Iranian government for meddling in Palestinian affairs.⁸⁹ Iran continued to support terrorist activities not only within the Middle East but also in other countries. US officials indicated that they had firm evidence that Iran was involved in assisting the terrorists who planted bombs in the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.⁹⁰ At a ceremony commemorating the victims killed in Argentina, Peres said that Israel knew who was responsible for the act but refrained from mentioning Iran by name, although Israeli government sources later stated that Tehran was responsible.⁹¹ In a debate devoted to the Iranian menace, Knesset Speaker Dan Shilanski said:

Today Israel is facing Iran, an enemy far more treacherous than Iraq before the war. It is incumbent upon us to stand firmly against the growing power of Iran, a country bent upon supporting an international network of political sabotage and armed terror. A country which invests a great deal of effort and sophistication in an attempt to remove its fingerprints from the terrorist activities which it sponsors against the Western world and the US which it calls 'The Great Satan'. Iran's agents do not abhor any methods. It was Iran that caused the explosion in the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires a year ago and it was Iran that murdered the Israeli security officer in Ankara.⁹²

In a speech to the 300 Jewish leaders who visited Israel in August 1993, Prime Minister Rabin said, 'The Iranian menace is a danger to Israel both in the short and long range. We

ought to continue the peace process and simultaneously cooperate with the United States and strengthen the moderate Arab regimes who support the peace process and oppose Islamic fundamentalism.⁹³ In response to the Iranian threat, the Israelis began searching elsewhere for security. Not only did they seek to promote better relations with the United States, they also extended their cooperation with Turkey into the military field. There were even reports of contacts made with Prince Reza Shah Pahlavi, the son of the late Shah, probably in order to find out whether he could be of possible use to Israel. However, a senior Israeli official who interviewed the prince was not encouraged by the conversation.⁹⁴

Iranian officials remained hopeful that the Arafat-Rabin agreement would collapse. In a speech to a group of Revolutionary Guards Commanders, Rafsanjani said: 'The PLO-Israel accord is a black page in the history of Palestine which should be cleansed by stancy [*sic*] and sacrifice of that nation.'⁹⁵ And in an interview with the prominent Egyptian journalist Muhammad Hassanein Heikal broadcast by Lebanese television on 28 November 1993, Rafsanjani lamented the fact that Egypt could no longer be relied upon to fight for the Palestinian cause. He told Heikal: 'We used to count on Egypt as the strongest source for the Jihad to liberate Palestine...but unfortunately at the present day we see that Egypt is pioneering the efforts to undermine the Jihad for Palestine.'⁹⁶ At the same time, reports were beginning to circulate regarding Iran's intensive efforts to build an atomic bomb. The tension in Israeli-Iranian relations mounted to such an extent that observers were led to conclude that in the event of a nuclear attack on its big cities Israel might respond with a retaliatory nuclear strike.⁹⁷

By the end of 1994, Iran embarked on a campaign aimed at persuading the Gulf countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Following Rabin's visit to Oman where he met Sultan Qabbus, Iranian sources said: 'There is no place for relations between Israel and the Arab states, whose purpose is to pressure Syria to come to the negotiating table.'⁹⁸

In January 1995, the Israeli press reported that Iran began producing agents for chemical and biological warfare. It was also reported that Iran started to produce solid propellant for ballistic missiles. The know-how and the equipment for such projects was reported to have come from Pakistan, Argentina, Russia and eastern Europe.⁹⁹ In May 1995 a terrorist bomb killed a number of Israeli soldiers in Beit Leed, and US sources reported that the terrorists who planted the bomb were trained in Iran.¹⁰⁰ According to *Newsweek*, the Iranian army began developing its own nuclear project. The army's atomic project seemed far more ambitious and dangerous than the one developed by Iran's civilian regime. According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Israel has been collecting data on Iran's nuclear pursuit and even tried to reach an agreement with Oman in this area. US officials did not rule out the possibility that Israel would bomb the site of the Iranian reactor.¹⁰¹

In response to criticism regarding their country's nuclear plans, Iranian officials argued that Israel was the real threat to peace in the region. Commenting on his country's plan to reactivate the Bushayr atomic reactor an Iranian official said, 'Even if we had these intentions, it should not come as a surprise, because Iran's number one enemy, Israel, is equipped with this weapon.'¹⁰² In December 1994, the Israeli daily, *Ha'aretz*, reported that North Korea had decided to test the Nodong surface-to-surface missile in Iran. The

purchase of these missiles by Iran was regarded by Israeli sources as a serious threat. In an interview on Israeli Army Radio, Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur stated: 'We know the Iranians are in contact with North Korea to purchase and produce together a missile that can reach a range of 1,300 km, maybe a little further. We assume that the enemy they see in their minds is the State of Israel.'¹⁰³

In January 1995, Israeli officials warned that Iran could produce a nuclear bomb within five years. A US official made a similar statement in an interview to the *New York Times*. An Israeli official interviewed by the same newspaper stated that if Iran did not stop the project Israel would consider an operation aimed at its destruction. The Israeli official stated that Iran's aim was to build many nuclear weapons in order to become a superpower. Israeli sources revealed that this project was carried out in Bushayr and added that Iran had purchased nuclear technology from Russia, the former Soviet republics, China, Pakistan and some European countries. Iran's reaction to the Israeli warning was that this was a distortion of facts about Iran and added its own warning saying, 'Israel would be making a fatal mistake if it thinks that it is capable of carrying out its threat without the fear of retribution.'¹⁰⁴

Alarmed by the news of Iran's nuclear buildup, Rabin called upon President Clinton and the head of the CIA to intensify their struggle against Iranian-sponsored terrorism. The tension between the two countries reached such dimensions in the spring of 1995 that *Jane's Intelligence Review* was led to conclude that the chances of confrontation between the two countries had risen considerably.¹⁰⁵ Rabin also protested to the Russian government about its plans to sell nuclear reactors to Iran. Tehran's official response was that it was planning to obtain nuclear know-how and equipment but only for peaceful civilian use.¹⁰⁶

The disappearance of Ron Arad, an Israeli pilot, in southern Lebanon intensified the tension in Israeli-Iranian relations. In March 1995, a German source reported that Arad had been captured by Islamic fundamentalists supported by Iran.¹⁰⁷ Rafsanjani responded by saying that Arad was not in Iran and that the attempts to cast the blame on Iran were a calculated move by Israel to cover up its criminal deeds in Lebanon. He also took the opportunity to blame Israel for kidnapping four Iranians in Beirut in 1982.¹⁰⁸ Seeking to isolate Iran and to curtail its ability to expand its arsenal, the Israelis attempted to impose an embargo on Iran. Uri Lubrani, the Israeli official in charge of Iranian affairs, called upon the United States to place an embargo on the purchase of oil from Iran. US government officials turned down the Israeli request saying that such an embargo would be useless.¹⁰⁹ The hostility between the two countries continued unabated and in the summer of 1995 Mossad agents in Istanbul kidnapped Herzl Rad, an Iranian Jew accused of spying for Iran, and brought him to Israel for trial.¹¹⁰ At the same time, Israel's continued attempts to obtain Iranian cooperation on Arad failed to produce results. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mahmud Mohammadi, insisted that his country had no information regarding the pilot, and when the Iranian diplomat Hassan Ali Yazdi was shot in Buenos Aires on October 1995, Tehran was quick to blame Israel. A Foreign Ministry spokesman in Tehran said, 'There is no doubt that this is a terrorist action aimed at poisoning Irano-Argentine relations, and that the Mossad and other Zionist organizations stand behind it.'¹¹¹

Minor as they were, these incidents continued to poison the bilateral relations. In

December 1995, Jordan expelled a member of the Iranian diplomatic corps whom it accused of plotting to ambush a group of Israeli tourists in Petra. The Iranian diplomat was identified as the No. 2 in the Iranian Embassy. Again, Iran denied the accusation and intensified its campaign to discourage the Arabs from establishing links with Israel. Reacting to Rabin's visit to Oman and Qatar, an Iranian radio commentator said on 2 April 1996: 'The closer the Arab governments get to Israel, the farther they get from their peoples... There are serious disagreements between the governments of the Arab countries and their peoples regarding the ties which these governments maintain with the Zionist regime.'¹¹² Speaking about the same issue, President of the Majlis, Ali Akbar Nasser-Nuri said, 'This matter brings sorrow upon us and shame upon the Arab states who maintain meeting with Israel regarding the establishment of commercial relations.'¹¹³

Israel's conflict with the guerrillas in southern Lebanon had further increased the tension between the two countries. Ami Ayalon, Director of the Israeli Intelligence Service, Shin Beit, argued that Israel had entered a new stage of terrorism inspired by Iran. Ayalon said that Iran was no longer using middlemen for its acts of terrorism but began to be directly involved in terror. Ayalon regarded Tehran's support of the Islamic Jihad as proof of Iran's new approach. Israeli intelligence officers concurred with Ayalon, arguing that Tehran's aim was to control south Lebanon. Head of the Mossad, Shabtai Shavit, described Iran as 'the academy from which the menace to Israel comes'.¹¹⁴ In addition, Israeli sources reported that Hizbollah fighters as young as 16 were being trained in Iran. A similar report in the *Sunday Telegraph* confirmed the veracity of their claims.¹¹⁵

Clinton's statements regarding the need for joint action against Iran and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's promise to extend the cooperation with Israel to achieve that end did not help ease the tension.¹¹⁶ Asked by a newspaper correspondent what was the reason behind Iran's hatred of Israel, his Iranian counterpart said, 'Israel is hurting us by portraying Iran as an extremist. Therefore, Tehran must respond.'¹¹⁷

Israel's spectacular success in establishing diplomatic relations with numerous countries stood in stark contrast to Iran's attempts to isolate it. Iranian officials lashed out at the Vatican for its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and in a Jerusalem Day gathering, Rafsanjani called upon all Muslims to wage a holy war against Israel.¹¹⁸ Tehran's anger mounted even further when Israel was reported to have been successful in its commercial ventures in the Persian Gulf. The newspaper *Resalat* wrote,

Allowing the Zionists to gain a foothold in the Persian Gulf would not help the Arab leaders to maintain their power. They have chosen the worst way and the most inappropriate time to preserve their rule. The infamy of the Persian Gulf Sheiks cannot be excused by the Arabs and other Muslims of the region.¹¹⁹

Iran's opposition to the peace process continued unabated. In response to Arafat's agreement with Rabin, Tehran Radio said that Arafat had lost credibility in the PLO. Arafat, said the announcement, 'cannot hope to break the resistance of the Palestinian people'.¹²⁰ Iranian hostility toward Israel became so intense that even the progress made in the peace talks with Syria did not ease the tension. Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar

Velayati reiterated that his country would never recognize the State of Israel and that peace between Syria and Israel would not cause any change in Iranian policy toward the Jewish state. Responding to the charge that it was responsible for the bombing of a Jewish center in Argentina, observers in Tehran said the act was a Zionist conspiracy with the complicity of the United States.¹²¹ In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Velayati said that Iran would continue to support the Hamas and the Palestinian organizations opposing the peace process. He stated that in his view the PLO did not represent the Palestinians in the occupied territories and added that his government repudiated the PLO's autonomy agreement with Israel. He admitted that his government identified with the Hamas but rejected the claim that it provided military assistance to that organization.

In an interview with the French daily *Le Figaro*, Rafsanjani attacked the Middle East peace process, saying that it ignored the rights of the Palestinians. He insisted that all Palestinians must be allowed to return to their homeland and that the Jews should return to the countries from which they came. He concluded by saying that Israel's presence in the Middle East was just as illegitimate as that of the Nazi regime in France had been.¹²² Tehran also indicated that it was attempting to muster the support of regional governments in order to counter the Israeli threat in the region. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammadi, told the press that the Zionist regime was a threat to peace and security in the region because it continued its nuclear plans and never accepted any inspection of its facilities.¹²³ Israel responded with a similar campaign designed to isolate Iran in the international community. A joint US-Israeli effort to prevent Japan from supplying Iran with credit for development projects resulted in a suspension of all funds allocated to these projects.

Relations between the two countries remained tense during the summer of 1996. The execution of Azizollah Lami, an Iranian Jew accused of Zionist espionage activities, caused great concern in Israel. Knesset member, Naomi Blumenthal, Chair of the Knesset's Immigration and Absorption Committee, called for immediate action to save the remaining 25,000 Jews still living in Iran.¹²⁴ Israel's relations with Iran continued to remain tense as the century was drawing to its close and they reached a new climax with the renewed violence in the West Bank and Gaza in the autumn of 2000. Prime Minister Sharon became the target of much criticism by the Iranian government whose officials accused him of undermining the peace process.¹²⁵ Moreover, press reports regarding Tehran's nuclear plans appear on a regular basis and the activities of the Iranian-supported Hizbollah persist despite Israel's withdrawal from the Security Zone. All these do not augur well for the future of the bilateral relations.

A thorough analysis of the bilateral relations reveals that as long as the Shah's regime remained in power the two countries maintained tacit but cordial relations. Both were motivated by pragmatic considerations. Israel regarded Iran as an important link in a peripheral chain that surrounded the hostile Arab world while Iran regarded Israel as a useful link to the West and a buffer preventing unity of the Arab world. Although both sides had significant economic interests, the overriding consideration was strategic. Iran's Islamic character prevented it from being overtly cordial to Israel. Consequently, Iranian foreign policy operated on two levels. On one level its public statements and declarations remained anti-Israeli—it constantly called upon Israel to withdraw from all Arab-

occupied territories and to restore Palestinian rights. The second level remained tacit and often secretive. Iran maintained close relations with Israel, purchased Israeli arms, exchanged intelligence information and even considered the possibility of forming a peripheral alliance with Israel, Turkey and Ethiopia. Furthermore, the Jewish community in Iran flourished under the Shah's regime, and the two countries cooperated in numerous projects.

A radical change in Iran's policy toward Israel occurred after the Shah's downfall. Yet, although the Khomeini regime adopted a policy of intense hostility to Israel, the change in Iran's policy toward Israel was not as radical as the official statements from Tehran implied. Although the Islamic Republic adopted hostile rhetoric in reference to Israel, the cooperation between the two countries did not cease. This was particularly the case in the military field—Israel had become a major supplier of arms to Iran and there were even military projects on which both sides collaborated.

Rafsanjani's rise to power did not bring a significant change in the bilateral relations, though his rhetoric seemed more cautious than that of Khomeini, his predecessor. The objectives of the new regime in the Middle East remained similar to the previous one. Iran continued to support both the terrorist groups in Lebanon and the militants within the Palestinian camp. In addition, it continued to sponsor terrorist activities in many areas throughout the world. The rhetoric of the new regime was similar as well. Rafsanjani's regime still denounced its enemies by branding them 'Zionist'. The United States remained 'Great Satan' and Israel 'Little Satan' but the commercial ties between Iran and the 'Satan' did not cease. In some ways Rafsanjani's regime was more pragmatic and more flexible than its predecessor. Nevertheless, the tension between the two countries did not subside. Even the rise of the pragmatic and more Western-oriented President, Ali Khatami did not ease the tension. Viewed from Israel's point of view, Iran's nuclear program constitutes a major menace to its survival. Yet despite its successful test-firing of an upgraded Shihab-3 ballistic missile and its development of the Shihab-4, Israeli officials remained convinced that Iran has no intention of targeting Israel in the near future.¹²⁶ What the future of Iranian-Israeli relations holds is difficult to ascertain. Iranian officials have made it clear that even an Israeli agreement with the Palestinians would not change their government's attitude, and Iran's determination to acquire nuclear capability and to undermine the peace process leaves little room for optimism.

NOTES

1. Shimoni to Eban, ISA 2565/25, 27 October 1948.
2. 'News from the Middle Eastern Countries: Iran', ISA 2565/25, 9 November 1948, No. 24, p. 3.
3. Eytan to Seyghal, ISA 2565/25, 28 September 1949.
4. Sharett to Hikmet, ISA 2565/25, 2 November 1949.
5. 'Le Chargé d 'Affaires de France en Iran a S.E. Monsieur des Affaires Etrangères', ISA 2565/25, 20 March 1950.
6. British Embassy in Tehran to Ernest Bevin, PRO FO/371, 82516, ER1023/8, 17 March 1950.

7. British Embassy in Tehran to Furlonge, PRO FO/371, 82516, ER1023/10, 26 June 1950.
8. S.Pines, 'Reactions on the Recognition in the Iranian Press', ISA 2565/25, 4 April 1950.
9. S.Pines, 'An Announcement by the Iranian Foreign Minister', ISA 2526/25, 27 April 1950.
10. Sykes to Cope, PRO FO/371, 164300, ER103134/2, 4 March 1962.
11. Judd to Horn, PRO FO/371, 82516, ER1023/8, 30 June 1950.
12. *Al-Hayat*, 12 October 1950.
13. Uri Lubrani, former head of the Israeli delegation to Iran revealed that prominent leaders such as Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Dayan, Eban and Begin visited Iran prior to the revolution. *Jerusalem Post*, 20 April 1980.
14. Sasson to Divon, ISA 2565/25, 18 October 1950; Frank to Divon, ISA 2566/19, 27 October 1950.
15. Chadwick to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 91713, ER10334/1, 16 July 1951; Pines to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2565/25, 29 July 1951; 8 August 1951.
16. Shimoni to Pollack, ISA 2565/24, 19 July 1951.
17. British Embassy in Tehran to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 91713, R10334/2, 30 July 1951.
18. 'Information for Israel's Representatives Abroad: Israeli Persian Relations', ISA 2565/24, 16 June 1953.
19. Herzog to Foreign Office, 2566/1, 22 December 1953.
20. 'Israel-Persia', ISA 2565/24, 22 July 1954.
21. 'Permission for Israeli Planes to Land in Persia', ISA 2565/24, 6 June 1955.
22. Gefen to Gazit, ISA 2565/24, 15 January 1956.
23. Fisher to Lewin, ISA 2561/5, 9 October 1956.
24. Shneorsohn to Eilat, ISA 2593/24, 17 September 1956.
25. According to Sultan Hussain Sanandaji, Chair of the Middle East Department in the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the Shah's reluctance to upgrade the relations with Israel was due to fear of reaction by the Soviet Union, the Arab states and the religious elements within Iran. Leishman to Rothnie, PRO FO/371, 142289, VR10334/6, 12 November 1959.
26. Russell to Hiller, PRO FO/371, 142289, VR10334/4, 14 July 1959.
27. *Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1960; *The Times*, 25 July 1960.
28. *Egyptian Gazette*, 6 September 1960; *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 January 1962.
29. The fact that General Pakhravan was among the Iranian officials who met Ben Gurion at the airport raised the suspicion that there was close liaison between the security services of both countries. British Embassy in Tehran to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 157753, ER103134/2, 20 December 1961.
30. 'Israel—A Secret Agreement', ISA 3433/49, 10 January 1962; Israeli Legation in Tehran to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3433/49, 2 February 1962.
31. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 155753, ER103134/2, 16 January 1962.
32. Harrison to Foreign Office; Military Attaché's Office in the British Embassy in Tehran to War Office, PRO FO/371, 164300, ER103134/1, 17 January 1962.

33. *Al-Hamishmar*, 22 February 1962.
34. Israel's Legation in Tehran to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3433/49, 11 April 1962.
35. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1962; Raffiach to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3433/49, 11 November 1962; Doriel to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3433/49, 2 January 1963.
36. A British Embassy official advised his government to dissuade the Shah's from yielding to Israeli pressure. Minutes by R.M.B.Chevalier, PRO FO/371, 170526, ER103134/1, 17 July 1963.
37. Phillips to Hiller, PRO FO/371, 170526, ER103134/1, 4 July 1963.
38. Beith to Morris, PRO FO/371, 180853, ER103134/2, 12 February 1965.
39. *Herut*, 11 November 1965.
40. *St Louis Post Dispatch*, 25 January 1968.
41. Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's interview with the Kuwaiti daily, *Rai al Am*, 1 June 1969.
42. Foreign Minister conversation with Foreign Minister Ardehsir Zahedi, Tehran, ISA 4174/4, 22 August 1968.
43. *Jerusalem Post*, 5 May 1973; 2 February 1973.
44. *Al-Jumhuriyah*, 3 October 1973.
45. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 May 1975.
46. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1976.
47. *Ibid.*, 24 October 1976.
48. *Ibid.*, 22 August 1977; 8 November 1977.
49. Naphtali Lau-Lavie, *Nation as a Lion: An Autobiography* (Tel Aviv, Ma'ariv, 1993), p. 353 [Hebrew].
50. *Jerusalem Post*, 12 October 1981.
51. *Ibid.*, 3 March 1978; *Washington Post*, 7 March 1978.
52. Ernest Gilman, 'Israel and the Iranian Oil Embargo: The Search for Alternative Sources of Energy', *The Round Table*, No. 276 (October 1979), p. 307.
53. Amnon Netzer, 'The Jews, Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Gesher*, Vol. 26, No. 100-1 (1980), pp. 47-8 [Hebrew].
54. *Rose el-Yussef*, 28 January 1979.
55. *New York Times*, 19 February 1979.
56. Iran's relationship with the PLO was about to suffer a setback at the beginning of 1982, when Tehran accused the PLO of contacting dissident Iranian leaders who resided in France at that time. PLO officials retaliated by attacking the Khomeini regime for its military ties with Israel. See *Saudi Report*, Vol. 3 (1 February 1982), p. 9.
57. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 March 1980.
58. *Ibid.*, 12 September 1982.
59. Jane Hunter, 'Covert Operations: The Human Factor', *The Link*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (August 1992), pp. 3-5.
60. *Jerusalem Post*, 26, 27 July 1981.
61. *Le Matin*, 18 March 1982.
62. *Liberation*, 12 July 1983.
63. *Boston Globe*, 21 October 1982.
64. *Jerusalem Post*, 20 March 1984; 17, 18 May 1984; 5, 17 June 1984; 7 October

1984.

65. *Ibid.*, 10 October 1984.

66. *Sunday Times*, 28 October 1984; *Observer*, 29 September 1985.

67. The idea for a joint Israeli-Iranian project emerged in the mid-1970s, when both Israel and Iran tried to purchase Pershing missiles from the United States and were turned down. Iran agreed not only to partially finance the project but also to provide the testing ground for the new weapon, beyond the borders of Israel's immediate neighbors. In the spring of 1977, Peres flew to Iran for talks with the Shah. The meeting ended in a US\$1 billion oil-for-arms agreement which covered six military projects, including the 'Flower'. *Jerusalem Post*, 3 February 1986.

68. 'We Knew the Undertakings Involved Great Risks: A Statement by the President, November 19, 1986' (Extracts), *American Foreign Policy Documents 1986* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987), Document No. 215, p. 413.

69. When asked about this matter Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger denied that the United States gave Israel permission to sell arms to Iran. 'US Arms to Iran', *American Foreign Policy Current Documents 1987* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), Document No. 571, p. 838.

70. *New York Times*, 1 April 1986.

71. Kimche, *The Last Option*, p. 211.

72. *Knesset Proceedings*, 25 November 1986.

73. *Jerusalem Post*, 10, 11 November 1986; 2, 3 December 1986.

74. *Ibid.*, 14 December 1986.

75. *Washington Post*, 16 August 1987; *International Herald Tribune*, 9 December 1991.

76. *Observer*, 13 September 1987; *Jerusalem Post*, 21 September; 18 November 1987.

77. *Ibid.*, 21 October 1982; 6 April 1984.

78. Lau-Lavie, *Nation as a Lion*, p. 352.

79. *Hatzofe*, 2 February 1987.

80. *Jerusalem Post*, 9 May 1984.

81. *Ibid.*, 30 September 1983.

82. *Iran Times*, 25 March 1991.

83. *The Echo of Iran* (hereafter EOI), Vol. 39, No. 43 (August/September 1991), pp. 2–3.

84. EOI, No. 54 (July 1992), p. 6.

85. *Al-Hayat*, 27 June 1996.

86. *Tehran Times*, 4 July 1994; EOI, No. 74 (April 1994), p. 6; No. 80 (November 1994), pp. 6–7; No. 10 (October 1992), p. 4; No. 58 (November 1992), p. 7.

87. Anti-Defamation League International Report—Middle East. 'Iran: A Growing Strategic Challenge to Israel and the Western World' (January 1993), p. 3.

88. EOI, No. 39 (November 1991), p. 5; No. 60 (January 1993), pp. 11, 12, 19; No. 62 (March 1993), p. 8.

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90. Yedidia Atlas, 'Another Muslim Jini Comes Out of the Bottle', *Nativ*, Vol. 4, No. 27 (July 1992), p. 11 [Hebrew].

91. *Hatzofe*, 18 March 1993.

92. *Knesset Proceedings*, 16 February 1993.
93. *Hatzofe*, 16 August 1993.
94. *Ma'ariv*, 12 February 1993.
95. *EOI*, No. 67 (August/September 1993), p. 6.
96. *Ibid.*, No. 69 (November 1993), p. 20.
97. See for example, Louis Rene Beres, 'Israel, Iran, and Nuclear War: A Tactical and Legal Assessment', *Survey of Arab Affairs: A Periodic Supplement to Jerusalem Letters/Viewpoints* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1 November 1993), p. 4.
98. *Ha'aretz*, 29 December 1994.
99. *Yediot Aharonot*, 4 January 1995.
100. *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1995.
101. *Ha'aretz*, 9, 21 May 1995; *Yated Ne'eman*, 4 May 1993.
102. *EOI*, No. 39 (April 1991), p. 10.
103. *Near East Report*, Vol. 38, No. 12 (21 March 1994), p. 46; Vol. 38, No. 46 (14 November 1994), p. 209; *Ha'aretz*, 16 December 1994; *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 17 December 1994.
104. *Ma'ariv*, 6, 8 January 1995.
105. *Ha'aretz*, 2, 19 May 1995.
106. *Kayhan International*, 16 September 1995.
107. *Al Hamishmar*, 3 March 1995.
108. Tehran had long argued that the four Iranians (three diplomats and a photographer) were kidnapped by the Christian Lebanese militia. Later it claimed that they were transferred to Israel. *Ha'aretz*, 8 June 1994.
109. *Ha'aretz*, 19 January 1995.
110. *Forward*, 11 August 1995.
111. *Ma'ariv*, 23 October 1995; *Tehran Times*, 29 October 1995.
112. *Ha'aretz*, 3 April 1996.
113. *Ibid.*
114. *Ha'aretz*, 6, 13 May 1996; *Ma'ariv*, 6 June 1996.
115. *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 June 1996; *Ha'aretz*, 8 July 1996.
116. Official Text: 'Iran Is Bent on Building Nuclear Weapons, President Clinton Says', President Clinton's Remarks to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), 7 May 1995. (United States Information Service: American Embassy, Tel Aviv, 9 May 1995), pp. 2–3; *Ha'aretz*, 2 July 1996.
117. *Ibid.*, 17 January 1994.
118. *EOI*, No. 71 (January 1994), p. 5; No. 73 (March 1994), p. 3.
119. Cited in *EOI*, No. 74 (April 1994), p. 5.
120. *EOI*, No. 70 (December 1993), p. 3; No. 80 (November 1994), p. 3.
121. *Ibid.*, No. 76 (June 1994), p. 13; No. 78 (August/September 1994), p. 12.
122. *Ha'aretz*, 13 September 1994.
123. *EOI*, No. 82 (January 1995), pp. 3, 4, 9.
124. *Yediot Aharonot*, 17 July 1996.
125. *Iran Daily*, 2 October 2001.
126. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 28 July 2000.

Part II
East Asia

3

China and Taiwan—Between the Hammer and the Anvil

The establishment of formal ties with China in 1991 was a momentous event in Israel's diplomatic history. Attempting to understand this rapprochement, historians had made use of historical analogies in order to explain what several years ago would have seemed unbelievable. It had been said, for example, that according to Chinese geologists China was a Mediterranean state before the earth assumed its final form; that both countries share a glorious past; that Communist China and the State of Israel were born at the same time; that both nations promoted strong ideologies and a robust sense of nationalism.¹ Such arguments appear so logical and convincing that one is likely to forget that bilateral relations are dictated by the imperatives of the moment and by the changes in the international system of alliances.

There is little or no evidence to suggest that any of the so-called 'common characteristics' affected the rapprochement between the two countries. In fact, the two countries have little in common. The Jewish communities in China were small and there were no large Chinese communities in the Middle East. Even the argument that Israel's experiment with socialism was similar to China cannot be substantiated. In fact, the communist ideology promoted by Mao Zedong bears little resemblance to the socialist Zionist ideology which triumphed in Israel in its early days. Despite the respect and the admiration that the Chinese had toward the Zionist socialist enterprise this factor never loomed large in the bilateral relations. Moreover, while Communist China regarded itself as a champion of all revolutionary movements and Third World countries, Israel with its pro-Western orientation and ties with the United States could hardly be classified as a Third World country.

The reasons for the ties between the two countries are more likely to be found in the changes that occurred within each country. They are first and foremost a consequence of the changing perception of the policy-makers of their country's position in the international arena. Governments establish diplomatic relations primarily for practical reasons; in order to benefit from other countries' technical and military expertise; to expand their economies or to gain more votes in the United Nations. Policy-makers do not search for common characteristics when they decide to establish diplomatic relations and the rapprochement between Israel and China was no exception.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was motivated by mutual benefit and should not come as a surprise to those exploring this topic. Israel's desire to overcome the siege mentality, which its citizens had been living with for so many years as a result of being a garrison state in the midst of a hostile Arab region, was a powerful factor which led the Israeli government to strive toward normalization with China.

As for China, its motives were more complex but just as pragmatic. Deng Xiaoping's government had gradually abandoned the rigid Maoist policy and expressed willingness to adopt some measure of *laissez faire* and to make adjustments in foreign policy. As the new government in Beijing saw it, the imperatives of the moment dictated better relations with the United States and Europe and a substantial reduction in foreign aid given to revolutionary movements around the world, even if that meant that China would have to abandon its role as their leader. The domestic constraints were no less compelling. There was an urgent need to embark on rapid modernization and reform at home. Consequently, investments were deemed more essential than ever and China's foreign policy had to be geared toward the attainment of economic prosperity. As Zev Sufott, Israel's first ambassador to China, put it, 'Economic modernization became the primary goal, and the task of China's foreign policy was to serve modernization.'² China was in dire need of financial and technological assistance. This need led to a dialogue with the United States and all countries capable of providing China with either financial aid or superior military technology. Therefore Israel, with a level of technology unusual for a country of that size, became an attractive candidate for friendship with China.

China was never entirely hostile to Israel. Numerous meetings were held throughout the years between Israeli and Chinese officials and both sides were receptive to the idea of diplomatic relations at some point or another. The equation of Zionism with imperialism, which became a common feature of Chinese propaganda under Mao Zedong, emerged largely as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict and even when China began to champion the cause of all revolutionary movements throughout the world its leaders maintained a sense of pragmatism that left the door open to rapprochement with countries often described as enemies.

Unlike their Indian neighbors, China's leaders of the Republican era had no hostility toward Zionism. On the contrary, they often expressed sympathy toward Zionist goals. For example, in a letter written to N.E.B.Ezra, a prominent figure in the Jewish community of Shanghai in 1920, the founding father of Republican China, Dr Sun Yat Sen expressed his support for the Zionist movement which 'has contributed so much to the civilization of the world and which rightfully deserves an honorable place in the family of nations'.³ By contrast, India's policy toward Israel bordered on hostile. Mohandas Gandhi did not waver from his conviction that Palestine belonged to the Arabs and never identified with Zionist aims. While India's leaders regarded Zionism as an offshoot of Western imperialism, which they had long despised, China's leaders were less inclined to make such comparisons. This was primarily because China had never effectively been controlled by an imperial power. It was only with the emergence of communism in 1949 that the theory equating imperialism and Zionism began to loom large in the government's policy. Hostility toward Zionism gave justification to China's pretense to become the champion of all revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements. Therefore, Maoist China did not refrain from denouncing Zionism when it suited its interests.

China's policy toward Israel was to a great extent determined by its relations with the Arabs and above all with the Soviet Union and the United States.⁴ China's attitude toward Israel remained unfriendly until the Sino-American rapprochement, which began during the Carter Administration. In 1969 Israel's Labor leader Yigal Allon had predicted

that Sino-Israeli relations would probably have to wait for a 'positive change' in Sino-American relations.⁵ However, the Sino-American rapprochement did not automatically lead to normal relations with Israel. There were contacts between the two countries but these remained limited to commercial and technical dealings, which the Chinese wished to keep secret.⁶ The establishment of diplomatic relations had to wait for a far more radical change. The end of the Cold War ushered in a new period in Chinese foreign relations. China no longer had to compete with the Soviet Union on the leadership of the socialist camp. The United States remained the only global power and China's leaders had the opportunity to reassess their foreign policy objectives. However, the saga of Sino-Israeli relations is far more complex than it appears at first sight, making it necessary to trace the bilateral relations from the beginning.

Shortly after Israel's establishment Ben Gurion announced his commitment to non-identification in foreign affairs. However, appreciating China's potential and the fact that the newly formed Jewish state was in dire need of allies he demonstrated a remarkable vision and sense of realpolitik by recognizing it on 8 January 1950. Neither the communist character of the Chinese regime nor US concerns played a significant role in the act of recognition.⁷ Believing that cordial relations with China could pave the way for rapprochement with Third World countries, Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem intensified their efforts to approach the Chinese.⁸ Moreover, they hoped that normal relations would enable the small Jewish community in China to immigrate to Israel. Although Foreign Ministry officials recommended that steps be taken to establish diplomatic relations with China, the government did not respond favorably. Its major concern was to secure the support of the United States and Western countries and the Foreign Minister felt that the time was not opportune for such a move.⁹ After much pressure from Israeli officials the issue was raised in the Cabinet on 28 June 1950. The government authorized the establishment of diplomatic relations but the Korean War delayed the implementation of the decision.

China's leaders who adopted communism and supported the North in the Korean War found themselves facing Western hostility. Seeking to reduce Western hostility they saw benefit in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. What made the rapprochement possible was not only the mutual need to escape isolation but also the lack of opposition to China within Israel. Neither the Israeli government nor the press ever promoted hostility toward China. The anti-communist campaign, which became a common feature in the propaganda of Western capitalist regimes was lacking in Israel. Moreover, the revolutionary Palestinian movement was still in its infancy and had not yet attracted China's attention. It was only after the Six Day War that the PLO began playing a significant role in Middle Eastern politics and China began emphasizing its role as a patron of the downtrodden Palestinians. This was a crucial point in the bilateral relations because no hostility had yet developed between the two countries. However, Israel's special relationship with the United States was a stumbling block which prevented the establishment of diplomatic relations with China at that time. Unwilling to antagonize Washington, the Israelis decided to reject China's overtures—a serious omission which many Israelis would live to regret. Another factor adversely affecting the friendship between the two countries was the tendency of the Israeli leaders not to become involved in Asian affairs. As previously mentioned, Israelis had traditionally tended to associate

themselves with Europe and its culture and had little desire to become part of Asia.

Israel's willingness to establish friendly relations with the Asian states was a result of necessity rather than natural affiliation. National security became a foremost consideration in the mind of Israeli policy-makers. Therefore, Israel's rejection of the Chinese overtures caused a flurry of arguments in Israel. In an interview with *Ma'ariv*, Eytan argued that financial reasons prevented Israel from establishing diplomatic relations with China. He added, 'Today it sounds ridiculous, but in those days we had to decide what takes priority: an embassy in a western European capital, or in China's capital. And we decided that China can wait.'¹⁰ Many felt that the Israeli government had let a golden opportunity slip by. Yohanan Ramati, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official who was on a mission in Hong Kong in December 1950 recalled: 'I sent an argued recommendation to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem—which was ignored. Moshe Sharett had neither the vision nor the courage to recognize China before the US did—by then China was no longer interested in recognizing Israel.'¹¹

The failure to establish diplomatic relations with China did not cause great upheaval in Israeli politics. China was a major issue only for the Israeli communists who were trying to determine which communist power should be recognized in Israel when communism spread to the Middle East. Torn by internal strife and disunited, the Communist Party did not constitute a major factor in the government's decisions regarding China, while other left-of-center parties such as Mapam and Achdut Ha'avoda remained relatively indifferent toward it.

Sino-Israeli relations suffered a severe setback when the Korean War erupted in 1950. The Israeli government did not wish to antagonize the United States and reluctantly condemned China's aggression in Korea. After a short period of tension caused by the deterioration of Israel's relations with the Soviet Union and the communist bloc, the attitude of the Chinese government began to change. The end of the Korean War, the Israeli-Soviet rapprochement and the end of the Indo-Chinese crisis improved the international atmosphere in China's periphery. China did not feel particularly threatened by Western domination and began paying greater attention to its international standing. Therefore, in 1953 the Chinese government moderated its anti-Israel statement and gave signals of its willingness to clear the diplomatic atmosphere. Consequently, Israel renewed its contacts with China. David Hacohen, Israel's energetic Ambassador to Burma, met Chinese representatives and in January 1955 an Israeli Trade and Goodwill Mission spent 20 days in China. The Chinese seemed willing to embark on a serious dialogue with Israel. However, the fear of antagonizing the Eisenhower Administration lingered and the Israeli government refrained from establishing diplomatic relations. This, critics argued, was a historical opportunity missed by Israel at a crucial moment when China began to adopt a pro-Arab stand, an omission for which Sharett, then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, is often blamed. Critics attributed this failure to the fact that he did not attach great importance to the Far East and preferred close relations with the West.¹² Some observers argued that the decision to maintain a distance from China was a calculated move made by the Israelis who wished to avoid a confrontation with the American Jewish leaders whose support was deemed essential at that point.¹³ According to Sufott, it was far from certain that the Chinese were really interested in diplomatic relations at that point. He argued that the Chinese government

was in no rush to respond favorably to Israel's proposal in the first place, even had there been one. He writes:

China had its own range of interests and priorities, in this case particularly in the wake of Bogor, on the eve of Bandung, and certainly thereafter. Even if Israel had agreed to diplomatic relations or proposed their establishment...it is entirely improbable that China would have acquiesced, or responded with a haste entirely out of character in the weeks preceding Bandung. It should be noted that not only was there no such haste even in responding to the Israeli invitation for a reciprocal visit, nor during the course of the Israeli visit nor in the weeks that followed, but that the Israeli invitation, significantly enough, had not even been mentioned in the communiqué issued at the end of the year. The conclusion that 'Israeli diplomacy had bungled' would appear to do less than justice to the realities of the evidence available.¹⁴

The meeting between Chou En Lai and Nasser at the Bandung Conference had left the Israelis disgruntled. Criticism of the government's failure to establish relations with China lingered on for quite some time. Whether or not this was a missed opportunity will continue to be debated. Those justifying the Israeli position explain that even if such relations had been established they would not have survived beyond the Six Day War or the Yom Kippur War, and most analysts believe that although Israel had missed an important opportunity this omission was by no means fatal.¹⁵

The Suez Affair brought China closer to the Arab states. Sporadic contacts between Israel and China continued until the early 1960s. Israel had often used foreign diplomats to contact the Chinese on its behalf. Heads of states such as French President François Mitterrand and US senators like Henry Jackson were among those involved in the attempt to initiate a dialogue with China.¹⁶ Israeli diplomats continuously sought every opportunity to find intermediaries. Apart from Foreign Ministry officials who occasionally dealt with China, politicians became involved in attempts to find honest brokers that had contacts with China. Thus for example, Deputy Defense Minister Peres attempted to establish contact with China through the mediation of Germany's Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauss who was on a mission to that country. Mao ruled out the possibility of friendship with Israel. His response was, 'How can we do that when they get arms from America and soldiers from Russia?'¹⁷ Undoubtedly, it was Mao's pragmatic policy that led him to maintain a distance from Israel. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, Mordechai Gazit explained why, in his view, China was reluctant to warm to Israel. He writes, 'The key to understanding the tough attitude of the Chinese toward us is to be found in the fact that the entire Chinese foreign policy is calculated and purposeful to cruelty.' He quoted the British diplomat R.T.D. Ledward as saying that Nasser had struck a certain deal with the Chinese and in return they agreed to exchange diplomatic representation with Egypt.¹⁸

Whether enough was done by the Israeli Foreign Ministry to improve the bilateral relations is open to speculation. Golda Meir had openly admitted that she was much more concerned about Israel's relations with the African states. Although she did not visit Africa until 1958, she was sympathetic to African nations which were then in the process

of de-colonization. Africa reminded her of the pioneering ideal, which was central to Zionist ideology as well as to her weltanschauung.¹⁹ She said in her memoirs that her contacts with the Asian states lacked the enthusiasm and the warmth that she experienced in the African states.²⁰ This also applies to other Israeli officials who had demonstrated much enthusiasm toward Israel's quest to gain the friendship of the African nations and remained relatively indifferent to Asia. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that Israel's efforts to approach China lacked intensity and were quite inadequate. By the mid- 1960s, all contacts with China came to an end. There was a growing sense of pessimism in the Israeli Foreign Ministry and in government circles regarding the future of the bilateral relations. In his address at Mapai's Tenth Convention on 16 February 1965 Prime Minister Levi Eshkol said: 'We recognize the great and growing importance of China in Asia and in the world at large. To our regret we have not yet found a readiness in Peking for the establishment of relations.'²¹

The Israeli government's decision to sell arms to India during the Indian-Chinese War of 1962 may have been one of the reasons for China's disappointment with Israel. Recognizing the negative impact that the arms sale had on Sino-Israeli relations, Golda Meir decided to turn down India's request for weapons in 1965. However, the damage was already beyond repair. By then China was undergoing a period of Cultural Revolution, its relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States deteriorated and it began supporting revolutionary organizations and national liberation movements throughout the world. Consequently, the PLO gained recognition and even military aid.

The Six Day War intensified China's anti-Israeli stand. China denounced Israel's victory by declaring, 'This was another towering crime against the Arab people committed by US imperialism and its tool Israel, as well as a grave provocation against the people of Asia, Africa and the rest of the world.'²² According to Heikal, both Mao and Chou En Lai had written to Nasser urging him not to accept the UN-imposed cease-fire and to continue fighting Israel.²³ Sino-Israeli relations continued to deteriorate and the Chinese openly identified with the PLO and praised its operations against Israel.²⁴ When China's admission to the United Nations was being considered Israel voted against it, a departure from earlier policy in which Israel supported China's candidacy to the United Nations even at Taiwan's expense.²⁵ China continued to support the Palestinians by providing arms and financial support, and Arafat proudly acknowledged the fact that China was the first nation to give substantial help to his organization.²⁶ What was particularly upsetting for the Israelis was the fact that China did not distinguish between the moderate PLO and the more extreme factions within the Palestinian liberation movement. Chinese officials maintained cordial relations even with the most radical Palestinian groups, which did not conceal their intention to liquidate the State of Israel. George Habash, leader of the extremist Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) boasted that China was the Palestinians' best friend because 'she wants Israel erased from the map'.²⁷

China remained unwilling to initiate a dialogue with Israel throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, and expressions of Chinese hostility were frequently heard. Thus for example, by the spring of 1978, China called upon the Arabs to unite in their struggle against Israel.²⁸ Israel's hope that the common hostility which both sides developed toward the Soviet Union would lead to better understanding did not materialize. On the contrary,

China competed with the Soviet Union in an effort to demonstrate that it was no less committed to championing the cause of revolutionary movements and the downtrodden masses in the Middle East. It was clear to the Israelis that only an improvement in Sino-US relations could change that situation. Furthermore, Israel's determination to maintain friendly relations with Taiwan prevented rapid normalization in Sino-Israeli relations.

When the fervor associated with the Cultural Revolution had abated in the late 1960s, China's leaders began reassessing their foreign policy. Their conclusion was that China's real enemy was the Soviet Union and not the United States. In addition, the need to embark on domestic reforms and to revive the economy forced China to open its market to the West. The possibility of expanding trade with the United States, whose major corporations seemed eager to invest in China, was a temptation too great to resist. Therefore, a period of Chinese-US rapprochement ensued and the United Nations admitted China as a member in October 1971. This time Israel voted for China's admission at the expense of Taiwan, which lost its membership as a result. This decision was not in line with the policy which Israel had pursued all along, except during the mid-1960s, when it was disappointed with China's championship of the Palestinian cause. This time the Israeli government realized that the recent Sino-US rapprochement provided Israel with another opportunity which should not be missed for improving relations with China. Despite its decision to vote for China, the Israeli government did not sever its relations with Taiwan and commercial contacts between the two countries continued.

Like Singapore, Taiwan often compared itself to Israel. According to one report, 'Taiwan loves to cite Israel as its role model—a beleaguered democracy standing up to a huge and hostile enemy.'²⁹ Nevertheless, Taiwan was reluctant to establish diplomatic ties with Israel. This reluctance stemmed less from anger over the Israeli vote as from fear of alienating the Arab countries whose markets were deemed important for Taiwan's prosperity. Taiwan's fear intensified in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, when the OPEC countries began using the oil weapon in order to prevent the United States and its Western allies from supporting Israel. Furthermore, the Arabs made a serious attempt to reinforce their boycott of Israel. This state of affairs, which forced the Japanese to comply with Arab demands, pressured the Taiwanese as well. Consequently, no formal relations could be established with Israel. It was clear to Israeli Foreign Ministry officials that friendship with Taiwan could only antagonize China as long as the tension between the United States and China persisted.

It was only in 1976, when the United States announced its intention to normalize relations with China that Taiwan began warming to Israel.³⁰ Israel's reluctance to sever its contacts with Taiwan can partially explain why the road to the Sino-Israeli rapprochement was so treacherous and why maintaining cordial relations with Beijing would continue to be a delicate matter requiring exceptional diplomatic artistry. The fact that Israel remained in a state of belligerency with its Arab neighbors forced its government to be less discriminatory in its search for allies and trading partners. The siege mentality of the Israelis was reinforced by the persistence of the Arab boycott. Consequently, pragmatism became a common characteristic of Israeli foreign policy. Contacts were maintained with numerous countries, whether or not these had formal relations with Israel. The considerations were practical—additional support in the United

Nations and increased trade that could offset the effect of the Arab boycott. Therefore, Israel maintained contacts with Taiwan even after its negative vote in the United Nations. In fact, commercial, scientific and intelligence exchange continued with greater intensity and expanded to many fields, including the military.³¹ Thus for example, in 1977 Israel gave Taiwan a license to produce the Gabriel-2 missiles.³² Also, there were recurrent reports that Israel was collaborating with Taiwan and South Africa in producing a tactical (low-yield) nuclear weapon to use in the event of an invasion from 'aggressive neighbors'.³³

Commercial contacts with Taiwan were easy to maintain. It was clear to the Israelis, however, that they could not hope to establish diplomatic relations simultaneously with China and Taiwan. Chinese leaders made it absolutely clear that such a step would not be well received in Beijing. These warnings continued intermittently even after the Chinese established diplomatic relations with Israel. Thus for example, on 2 July 1992, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that China was opposed to any country establishing diplomatic ties simultaneously with the Chinese mainland and Taiwan;³⁴ and in November 1992, Beijing expressed its disappointment over Israel's decision to welcome Taiwan's Vice Foreign Minister John Chang. Israeli officials responded by saying that the visit's purpose was strictly commercial and that Chang would not meet senior Foreign Ministry officials.³⁵ On 19 November 1992, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Jianmin said that China opposed the sale of weapons to Taiwan by any country, 'no matter whether the sales are made public or kept secret'.³⁶ He tactfully refrained from mentioning the arms sales by Israel. Chinese officials made similar statements on several occasions. Nevertheless, China never went as far as to warn that its diplomatic relations with Israel would be adversely affected as a result.

The Taiwanese were no less sensitive about this issue, while being remarkably shrewd and pragmatic. They indicated their willingness to continue trading with Israel; however, they made it clear that Israel must refrain from supporting China's claim to Taiwan. On 25 January 1991, one day after a joint communiqué announcing the beginning of diplomatic relations between China and Israel, Ouyang Jui-Hsiung, the spokesman for the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry, announced: 'So long as it is of mutual interest to our countries, we will continue to negotiate with Israel about the exchange of trade offices.' However, Ouyang said that his government would 'not recognize any agreement between Peking and Tel Aviv over the sovereignty and other rights of our country'.³⁷ The Taiwanese had shown remarkable sensitivity to Israel's needs and refrained from impairing its relations with China. On 28 October 1992, Chang admitted that 'secret' negotiations with Israel had been going on for two years. He described the information as 'highly secretive' and added that his country should not 'cause our friend unnecessary trouble'.³⁸

The Israelis continued their commercial contacts with the Taiwanese in an unobtrusive manner. Asked to comment on the veracity of a report that the United States had permitted Israel to sell Taiwan Kfir aircraft as part of a US\$1 billion deal between the two countries, Defense Minister Arens told the Voice of Israel correspondent, Karmela Menashe that 'Israel does not disclose her arms deals'.³⁹ Taiwan ended up canceling the purchase of the Kfir aircraft. According to *Aviation Week* this decision was caused by fear of alienating Saudi Arabia, which supplied Taiwan with most of its oil. In addition,

Taiwanese sources argued that operational considerations such as the difficulty in obtaining spare parts for the aircraft had a discouraging effect on their decision.⁴⁰ Even the Sino-American rapprochement did not change Israel's policy toward Taiwan. In the summer of 1995, Taiwan's aviation company transferred two Boeing 747 jets to the Israeli Bedek aviation company whose officials agreed to convert them at the cost of US\$100 million.⁴¹ Yet, despite the cooperation between the two countries, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not wish to publicize their contacts with Taiwan. When the Israeli Foreign Ministry sent Ilan Ma'or as a commercial representative in Taipei it kept the appointment secret in order to avoid offending the Chinese.⁴²

When Taiwan's President planned to pass through Israel during his visit to the Middle East in the spring of 1995, Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem stated that they firmly objected to the visit on the grounds that it might offend China.⁴³ According to the *Armed Forces Journal* the Israeli government ordered all its arms companies to minimize their dealings with Taiwan significantly as a result of Chinese pressure. Israeli sources were reported to have said that the reason for this step was Israel's disappointment over Taiwan's tendency not to take its business proposals very seriously.⁴⁴ By then it had become abundantly clear that Israel's eagerness to woo Taipei had diminished considerably. A correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported from Jerusalem saying, 'it is now Jerusalem's turn to snub Taipei'.⁴⁵ A careful analysis of Israel's relations with Taiwan reveals clearly that Israel began to give high priority to its relations with China. While the value of Israel's exports to China amounted to more than US\$1 billion in 1994, its exports to Taiwan totaled no more than US\$70 million. However, the Israelis saw great potential in Taiwan and many argued that expanding trade with it was not likely to impair Israeli-Chinese relations as long as Israel refrained from making political statements supporting Taiwan. Consequently, the volume of trade increased considerably toward the end of the decade despite the fact that the Israeli Aircraft Industries canceled a US\$300 million deal to establish an aircraft maintenance center in Taiwan. In February 1998, Israel and Taiwan signed a protocol for cooperation in promoting investments. The bilateral trade in 1997 was US\$553 million, up 17 per cent over 1996. Israel's exports to Taiwan totaled US\$201 million, up 51 percent compared with 1996.⁴⁶ This was despite the existence of a powerful pro-China lobby in Israel and industrialists like Eisenberg who saw greater opportunities for profit in China and were therefore determined to help maintain strong ties with it. The pro-China lobby intensified its pressure on the Israeli government in the spring of 1999, after Chinese leader Jiang Zemin asked Israel not to grant recognition to Taiwan.⁴⁷ Only one minister, Masha Lubelsky, insisted on giving priority to Israel's ties with Taiwan. Given the sensitive nature of this issue one can safely assume that as long as the conflict between China and Taiwan persists Israel's relations with Taiwan will continue to be maintained in a low-profile manner.

China's policy changed considerably after the early 1970s and there was a willingness to recognize Israel. However, the Chinese government insisted that as long as there was no solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian dilemma no diplomatic relations could be established. China's assault on Israel abated significantly toward the end of the 1970s, after which cooperation between the two countries expanded to many areas such as science, education, agriculture, industry and tourism. There were even

reports, which the Chinese authorities persistently denied, that the two countries were cooperating in the military field. Eisenberg, the wealthy Israeli industrialist who had already begun to make enormous profits in Central Asia, was the Mossad's agent in China.⁴⁸

One of the main reasons for China's willingness to improve its ties with Israel was that its new leaders became aware of the fact that without allies China would not be capable of making healthy economic progress. The overriding consideration was not strategic but economic and techno-logical.⁴⁹ China's new leaders became less ideological and more pragmatic. Therefore, they tried to buy technological know-how from any country willing to sell it.⁵⁰ As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, Deng's government felt that it would be solved only through negotiations and mediation by the superpowers. Gone were the days when China regarded the Arab-Israeli conflict simply as a product of American capitalist machinations. Recent events in the Middle East had proven that Israel was far from being a puppet manipulated by the United States. Washington's failure to establish peace in the region by convincing the Israeli right-wing Likud government to refrain from expanding the settlements in the West Bank and to make the necessary concessions for peace had demonstrated to the Chinese that Israel was much more independent than had hitherto been assumed. China's leaders found out that the old rhetoric regarding the Middle East and the role they attributed to US imperialism in it was a gross oversimplification. Furthermore, they came to the realization that their financial support of the Palestinians did not help promote peace in the region. The PLO became increasingly disunited and there was no real progress toward self-determination. At the same time the Chinese were encouraged by the Camp David accords and expected the PLO to join the peace process. As it turned out, however, China's approval of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty had alienated the Palestinians. Hoping to play a greater role in world affairs and to promote better relations with the United States, the Chinese became convinced that establishing relations with Israel would help improve their image in Washington's eyes.

China's policy became more pragmatic during the late 1970s. In March 1977 the Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations met with the Israel's Ambassador for the first time since the 1950s. The Chinese continued to maintain contact with Israel but they expressed disappointment over the fact that the Israelis were too open about the relations, as a result of which the relationship assumed a more secretive nature.⁵¹ The Israeli-Egyptian negotiations, which culminated in the Camp David accords, ushered in a new period in Sino-Israeli relations. In July 1977 China's Foreign Minister Huang Hua stated:

We do not endorse the one-sided idea of certain ultra-leftists that Israel should be eliminated. Since Jews in Israel are also one of the peoples of the world, they have a right to national survival. We really do not want to see the tragedy of homeless Palestinians repeated in Jews.⁵²

Despite this pronouncement, the Israelis were realistic enough not to expect a radical change in China's Middle East policy. In a speech delivered on 20 May 1979 at Tel Aviv University, Eban said, 'We must assume that for Africa and Asia, Israel's claim to renewed friendship and relationships will depend on a solution to the Palestinian problem rather than on a bilateral treaty between Egypt and Israel.'⁵³ Indeed, China continued to

insist on a solution to the Palestinian problem. The Israelis, however, sought a quicker way to establish ties with China. An article in the American monthly *Penthouse* reported that the Mossad was instrumental in organizing talks between Israel and China.⁵⁴ Yet China did not seem willing to relinquish its pro-Palestinian rhetoric and several months later it pledged to arm 30,000 Palestinians.⁵⁵ When Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang visited Cairo at the end of 1982, he said that peace in the Middle East would become a reality only after Israel withdrew from the occupied territories and Palestinian rights had been restored.⁵⁶ Despite this, the bilateral relations continued to improve and cooperation subsequently expanded in many fields. In October 1984, Chinese businessmen came to Tel Aviv to participate in the Fourth World Congress of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation.⁵⁷

Contacts between the two countries expanded into the military field as well. By 1982, reports that Israel has been selling advanced defense technology to China began to appear more frequently in the press.⁵⁸ By the mid-1980s, over 60 Israeli companies had joint projects with China,⁵⁹ and commercial contracts were signed between the two sides through third parties and contractors.⁶⁰ According to David Buxbaum, an American lawyer who represented US and European business interests in China, Israeli trade was more substantial than the entire US trade with China up until 1972.⁶¹

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was frequently discussed during the 1980s. On 11 April 1987 Foreign Minister Peres met Jordan's King Hussein in London. They agreed that China and the Soviet Union must establish diplomatic relations with Israel if they were to participate in an international Middle East peace conference.⁶² A memorandum of understanding between US Secretary of State George Schultz and Prime Minister Shamir was presented at the Israeli Foreign Ministry. It stated that 'The participation of the People's Republic of China is contingent upon the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.'⁶³ On 30 September 1987 Peres and Foreign Minister Wu Xuegian met at the United Nations. This was the first meeting between two such high-ranking officials.⁶⁴ At the same time, military cooperation between the two countries intensified. According to British sources, Israel sent hundreds of military technicians to Beijing in order to modernize Soviet-made tanks and artillery.⁶⁵

Peres's argument that by adopting a pro-Arab policy China could have no impact on the course of events in the Middle East was not taken lightly in Beijing.⁶⁶ The Chinese seemed to have learned the implications of their pro-Arab policy and as they became more involved in world affairs it became clear to them that they would have to take part in the peace process in the Middle East. In 1981 China began supporting the idea of an international conference for the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict but made it clear that the peace talks must be sponsored by the five permanent UN members.⁶⁷ The Chinese government did not change its policy as radically as the Israelis had hoped. Statements condemning the Israeli suppression of the Intifada were frequently heard. Thus for example, when riots erupted near Tel Aviv following the shooting of Palestinians by Israeli youth on 20 May 1990, a Chinese government spokesman said, 'We strongly condemn the acts of suppressing people by the Israeli authorities and express our deep sympathy for the innocent Palestinians slaughtered in the incident.'⁶⁸

China's interest in joining the peace process was stimulated by its desire to end its isolation in the international arena that followed the 1989 massacre of the pro-democracy

demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.⁶⁹ Chinese Premier Li Peng stated that China was in need of a long-term peaceful international environment and added, 'This is an indispensable external condition for its modernization programme.'⁷⁰ In addition, China's leaders were seeking to obtain military hardware from Israel. A report on a major Israeli arms sale to China appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in June 1990, but Israeli officials were quick to deny its validity. Dr Yosef Shalhevet, director of Israel's Academic Liaison Office in Beijing told the *Jerusalem Post*, 'This is exclusively an academic office. We have absolutely nothing to do with the military...or the sale of arms.'⁷¹ A report in *Davar* quoted a British newspaper as saying that former Defense Minister Rabin confirmed that Israel had sold Lavi aircraft to China after Israel had decided to stop their production.⁷² Moreover, Israeli Defense Ministry officials maintained close contacts with Peking.⁷³ Reliable statistics on the magnitude of the arms deals are not available but their value was said to have reached billions of US dollars. Thus for example, on 22 November 1991 the daily *Ha'aretz* reported that Israel and China maintained what it described as 'an intricate and covert system of arms deals encompassing billions of dollars'.

The Sino-Israeli rapprochement cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration China's policy in the Far East and the nature of the Sino-Japanese rivalry. Undoubtedly the ties with Israel were part of a Chinese grand design to normalize relations with all Asian countries in order to use their political support against Japan. As one scholar put it, 'Li Peng takes great credit for new successful ties in Asia, from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia to India. The goal of this Asian policy is to have Communist China rise economically with Japan and politically with the rest of Asia against Japan.'⁷⁴

The autonomy deal between Israel and the PLO, which was signed in September 1993, enabled Sino-Israeli relations to develop with greater intensity. The Israeli government felt more confident dealing with China. Convinced that Israel has fulfilled China's wish by making concessions to the Palestinians, Prime Minister Rabin said before his trip to China in October 1993, 'I can go to China with my mind at rest.' Rabin sought to convince China's leaders to terminate the sale of arms to Syria and Iran. However, although China seemed encouraged by the autonomy agreement it was by no means ready for a complete departure from its traditional policy. Rabin was encouraged by the recent developments in the bilateral relations but he said, 'I don't expect sensational results from the trip.'⁷⁵ The Chinese government was unwilling to abandon its demand that Israel make greater concessions to the Palestinians and insisted on real progress in the autonomy plan.

The collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated the process of China's entry into the Middle East as it sought to replace the Soviet Union as the champion of the socialist regimes.⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, Israel's insistence that China establish diplomatic relations with it before entering the peace process contributed to the normalization process. The cultural and economic contacts between the countries became more frequent by the mid-1980s, when the Chinese encouraged cultural visits and lifted travel restrictions for individuals with Israeli passports who came in an official capacity. In October 1991, China's Foreign Minister told members of the World Jewish Congress that his government had come to the conclusion that the 1975 UN resolution, which equated Zionism with racism, was a major distortion of reality and an insult to the Jewish people.⁷⁷ China refrained from

openly condemning the resolution when the United Nations discussed the issue. Nevertheless, further progress was made and in January 1992 full diplomatic relations were established. In the same month China agreed to the opening of a flight route between Tel Aviv and Beijing.⁷⁸ An agreement allowing Israel to operate charter flights on that route was reached two months later.

China's willingness to establish relations with Israel can be attributed in part to the changes that had taken place in the Chinese Politburo. The gradual demise of the revolutionary veterans and the increasing number of reform-minded technocrats resulted in a pragmatic attitude in foreign affairs. The Politburo Standing Committee, composed immediately after the incident in Tiananmen Square in 1989, had hardliners and moderates in equal number. Thereafter, the Politburo expanded from 14 to 20 members, with 14 newcomers replacing eight members of the old guard. These new leaders were more committed to reform and less to ideology.⁷⁹

China's policy toward the Middle East was largely determined by opportunism. Officially, its leaders pursued a policy of neutrality. The same policy that China maintained toward the Iran-Iraq War during the 1980s was pursued in the early 1990s toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the Iran-Iraq War Chinese businessmen and government officials made large profits by selling arms to both sides, and later the Chinese decided on rapprochement with Israel while simultaneously selling ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia. Despite its official statements, China did not develop a consistent policy in the Middle East—as one keen observer put it, 'Most of the time, China's Middle East policy lacks focus because of the vagueness of China's self image vis-à-vis the countries in the area. There is no moral disorder to be rectified, so there is no consistent policy to be pursued.'⁸⁰

Despite the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries China still wished to maintain normal relations with the Arab states. It decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel 18 months after normalizing its relations with Saudi Arabia. When Yang Fuchang, China's Vice Foreign Minister, met Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa at the end of January 1992, he assured him that his government would continue to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.⁸¹ A Chinese delegation, which arrived in Israel at the invitation of the Mapam Party at the end of March 1992, announced its decision to meet with members of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks and with representatives of the Palestinian left.⁸² China continued to supply missile technology to Syria, and one CIA report revealed that more than 30 tons of chemicals needed to make a solid-fuel missile had been shipped to Syria.⁸³ In a Middle East security conference, which took place in Brussels on 11 May 1992, Sha Zukang, the Chinese representative, said that all Middle Eastern countries should have the right to participate in the region's economic development and that arms control in the region should be regulated in a balanced manner.⁸⁴

Chinese officials continued to expect Israel to be more flexible in its attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, the first senior leader to travel to Israel after the establishment of diplomatic relations, expressed his hope that Israel would make a greater effort to resolve the Middle East conflict.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Qian's visit was regarded as a great achievement. President Herzog told journalists that the visit brought the bilateral relations to new heights.⁸⁶

In March 1992, the *Washington Times* reported that Israel had transferred a Patriot missile and its technology to China. Once again, the report triggered an angry response from officials in the Israeli defense establishment who dismissed it as a baseless rumor. A similar denial was issued by the Chinese delegation which visited Israel at the end of that month.⁸⁷ At the beginning of September 1992, China and Israel signed a trade pact giving China the status of most-favored-nation. The pact also provided for the elimination of trade barriers between the two countries.⁸⁸ Sino-Israeli relations have expanded to other areas as well: on 7 February 1993 Science and Technology Minister Moshe Shetreet and China's Vice Minister of the State Science and Technology Commission Li Xiaoshi met in Israel and decided to sign an agreement on agricultural and scientific cooperation.

The Chinese have come to the realization that maintaining good relations with only one side in the Arab-Israeli conflict did not earn them handsome dividends and there is good reason to assume that in the foreseeable future China will attempt to pursue a balanced policy in the Middle East. The fact that Arab companies remained indifferent to the amity between the two countries and even expressed a desire to increase their investments in China helped pave the way for better relations. Nevertheless, Chinese policymakers seem determined to demonstrate impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus for example, on 19 December 1992 a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman called upon Israel to stop expelling Palestinians. Shortly afterwards, China's Premier Li Peng told President Herzog that a just settlement in the Middle East had to include the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, in his reply to Arafat, Li Peng denounced the expulsion of the Palestinians and Israel's refusal to readmit them, but despite this, China did not go to the extent of reassessing its policy toward Israel. President Yang Shangk told Herzog, 'I am of the opinion that we have no points of conflict. The interest we both share is cooperation that benefits each other.'⁸⁹

For the Chinese government, the Middle East peace talks provided an opportunity to reduce the damage which a rapprochement with Israel entailed. During his visit to Israel in September 1992, Qian stressed the need to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and reassured Israeli diplomats that China would not do anything to sabotage the peace process. By portraying the image of an honest broker, China hoped that the dilemma of alienating the Arab world would come to an end once and for all. China was even willing to participate actively in a Middle East peacekeeping force if Israel showed flexibility in the talks. In his meeting in Beijing with an Israeli delegation which included Knesset members Dedi Zucker, Silvan Shalom and Dalia Itzik, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Yang Fuchang said, 'If you sign a peace agreement with Syria, the PRC [People's Republic of China] will see to it that the international community gives maximum guarantees and assurances, with the PRC contributing its share, perhaps even by participating in a multinational force.' Moreover, he reassured his guests that the nuclear cooperation between his country and Iran was being closely supervised by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and that Iran would comply with its regulations. At the conclusion of the meeting he expressed his desire to host Foreign Minister Peres and said that China was in favor of an independent Palestinian state without jeopardizing Israel's security.⁹⁰

China's policy toward Israel has changed considerably despite its public announcements regarding the need to establish a Palestinian state. An influential political

analyst had privately acknowledged that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government has changed its outlook toward the Palestinian issue. He told Lillian Craig Harris, 'We see now that not every small group or nationality can have its own country.'⁹¹ And when Peres paid a visit to China in May 1993, Qian assured him that China would no longer sell missiles to Iran or Syria. Both sides agreed to discuss issues of mutual concern and the Chinese promised that the new relationship would be reflected in China's votes at the United Nations.⁹² Moreover, Qian told Peres that since China's economy was expanding rapidly, economic cooperation with Israel would be most welcome.⁹³ Another factor stimulating cooperation was that both countries sought to prevent the spread of militant Islam in Central Asia.⁹⁴ Israel's newly established relations with the secular regimes in the Caucasus and Central Asia and the agricultural improvements made by its engineers were regarded favorably by the Chinese who hoped that the modernization would prevent the rise of fundamentalist regimes there.

One of the most serious constraints on Israel's foreign policy was the fear of antagonizing Washington. US officials had repeatedly cautioned Israel against establishing diplomatic relations with hostile countries. When news arrived in Washington in the summer of 1993, regarding talks between Israel and North Korea, Israel was asked to cease the contacts.⁹⁵ Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin had openly admitted that the decision to cease all contacts with North Korea was a result of American pressure.⁹⁶ A month later the Israelis were asked to cease their negotiations with Cuba and they complied.⁹⁷ Similarly, Israel's attempts to establish ties with China had suffered as a result of interference by Washington and this often led to frustration in Israel. An editorial entitled 'Excessive Intervention' appeared in the Israeli press. It read in part:

The US Administration has recently displayed a growing intervention in Israel's foreign relations. It is true that this intervention occasionally takes place when we are dealing with despicable, terror-supporting, or otherwise dangerous regimes, but this is not always the case... Such intervention or the fear thereof, postponed the mutual recognition between Israel and China for about 40 years, something which greatly harmed Israel's foreign relations...the US position, while duly recognizing its importance, can be only one element in a whole network of considerations. It must not become, however, the dominant or sole element of the Israeli Government's independent decisionmaking process.⁹⁸

Washington's interference in Israeli-Chinese relations increased as a result of the military collaboration which accompanied the establishment of diplomatic relations. The success of the Israeli military equipment in the numerous encounters which the IDF had with Arab regular and guerrilla forces was quite impressive. This fact became abundantly clear in the Lebanon war of 1982. Particularly impressive was the performance of the Israeli Air Force. The Chinese became interested in Israeli air technology and by the end of 1985 Air Force officials were contacted and invited to visit China.⁹⁹ Washington had constantly voiced its objection to the transfer of US military technology to a third party.¹⁰⁰ News of Israeli arms deals with China began to leak by the early 1980s. In November 1984, an influential defense publication revealed that arms contracts totaling

1–3 billion dollars had been signed between the two countries and that Israeli military experts had been sent to China.¹⁰¹ Initially both Israel and China denied the reports, but by the beginning of the 1990s it became harder to deny their veracity due to the increase in the number of the officials involved. Politicians and businessmen found it difficult to overcome their natural proclivity to brag about their success with China. Journalists were, as usual, searching for scoops. Consequently, the secret was revealed and the Israeli government found it difficult to deny that it sold military technology to China. In an interview with Cable News Network on 14 March 1992, Defense Minister Arens admitted for the first time that Israel was selling arms to China.¹⁰² This was Israel's first admission that it was dealing with China on that level. However, the Israelis always denied that US arms or technology were involved. A report published by the General Accounting Office in Washington in August 1993 stated explicitly that Israel had sold Arrow missile technology to third parties. Rabin categorically denied this report saying, 'Are we so stupid that we would do such a thing? Israel is fully aware that this would violate both its commitments and US law, and had not done so.'¹⁰³

Rabin's statement did not allay American fears. A CIA report stating that Israel had been selling advanced military technology to China for the last decade was published two months later. According to this report, the value of the Israeli deals may have reached 'several billion dollars'. CIA Director R. James Woolsey voiced his concern that these deals might continue. He said, 'Building on the long history of close defense industrial relations—including work on China's next-generation fighter, air-to-air missiles and tank programs—and the establishment of diplomatic relations in January 1992, China and Israel appear to be moving toward formalizing and broadening their military technical cooperation.' The Israelis continued to deny the veracity of the report. Ruth Yaron, a spokeswoman at the Israeli Embassy said: 'Israel adheres to all of its commitments to the United States with regard to its relationship with China.'¹⁰⁴ Once again, Rabin responded to the report by calling it 'a total nonsense'.¹⁰⁵ However, in an interview with the *Associated Press* in January 1995, the General Director of the Israeli Defense Ministry, David Ivri, admitted that Israel has supplied aircraft technology to China.¹⁰⁶

The danger that such reports would cause a serious rupture in US-Israeli relations has diminished considerably due to Beijing's rapprochement with Washington. Nevertheless, Israeli officials continued to deny that Israel was selling sophisticated arms to China and when it was no longer possible to deny the reports they downplayed the issue. They argued that the total value of sophisticated technology sold to China between 1992 and 1995 amounted to no more than US\$31.5 million.¹⁰⁷ When Li Peng visited Israel to inspect the industries that were outfitting Chinese aircraft with sophisticated surveillance radars a spokesman for the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms, asked that Israel reconsider the issue. The Israelis argued that their sales included items manufactured in Israel and that very little US technology was involved.¹⁰⁸ The Israelis did not share US concerns about the possible threat that the supply of arms could have to Taiwan's security. Nor did they share US concerns about the violation of human rights by China. They simply regarded US pressure as an attempt by American private companies to deny Israel the opportunities which they would have liked to exploit had they been allowed to do so by the US government.¹⁰⁹

Sino-Israeli cooperation intensified during the mid-1990s. In April 1994, Israel's

Energy Minister Moshe Shahal met Chinese officials and discussed the possibility of cooperation between the two countries, and in the spring of 1995 an agreement to supply electricity to China was signed.¹¹⁰ Israel's Finance Minister Avraham Shohathas traveled to Beijing with his aides. Several deals were made during the trip. In one of the deals China agreed to send farmers and construction workers to replace Palestinians who were no longer allowed to work in the West Bank and Gaza as a result of the intensification of the terrorist activities of Palestinian fringe groups. Both Israel Corp., headed by Eisenberg, and the government-owned Agridev Company continued to generate profits in China and the contacts expanded into the military field as well. In the summer of 1996, Israel agreed to a US\$250 million arms deal with China; but the deal was not carried out due to strong objections from Russia.¹¹¹

As the century drew to a close cooperation between the two countries increased despite Washington's disapproval. But there were also occasional episodes of friction between the two countries. These stemmed primarily from the fact that the Chinese were trying to please both the Israelis and the Palestinians. By the end of November 1999 Li Peng was invited to address the Knesset. However, Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg decided to meet the Dalai Lama a day before Li Peng's visit. The Chinese government regarded the event not only as an insult to Li Peng but also as interference in its internal affairs and as support for Tibet's secession from China. Anxious to pacify the Chinese, the Israelis raised the status of Li Peng's visit and he became not only the guest of the Knesset but also of the Israeli government. Neither side allowed the incident to harm the military cooperation. China's Defense Minister, General Chi Haotian, and his delegation of 17 experts visited Israel in October 1999. They met Prime Minister Barak and President Weizman and visited the Israel Aircraft Industries. This visit came a year after Israel's Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai visited China with his delegation.

When President Jiang Zemin visited Israel in the spring of 2000, the Israeli government found itself in a serious quandary. Despite opposition from Washington it had to honor its contract to sell China a US\$250 million early warning system and radar-equipped planes that could enhance China's surveillance capability over Taiwan. In response to Washington's criticism the Israelis argued that the United States had sold AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control Systems) surveillance aircraft to Saudi Arabia in the 1980s. Moreover, the Israelis felt that Washington was not resolute on this issue and remained confident that all the clamor about the sale would soon subside. Sufott told journalists, 'The Americans hemmed and hawed, but never said no... All of a sudden, it became too public and Congress started making a lot of noise, basically to show how patriotic they are and to make problems for the administration.' He added, however, that 'Israel's priority international interest is its relationship with the US and not China, so if the pressure is powerful and strong enough, I think we'll have to give up on this.'¹¹²

Realizing that defying the US appeal could have grave consequences, the Israelis moderated their approach on that issue. Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, who dismissed Washington's criticism, found it prudent to appear less aggressive and said that Israel would very seriously consider the opinion of the 'good and true friends in the United States'.¹¹³ However, the Israelis had no intention of renegeing on their promise to China to go through with the deal. They announced that they were committed to sell at least the first surveillance plane and would then freeze the deal. But Israel's proposal did

not satisfy the Americans who argued that even the sale of one item would provide China with a technological superiority that could harm US security.¹¹⁴

Both China and Israel remained determined to continue the cooperation. Consequently, China's leaders thought it prudent to strive toward a balanced policy in the region. During his visit to Israel in April 2000, Zemin met Arafat and addressed the Palestinian Assembly. While trying to avoid offending Israel he expressed support for the Palestinian struggle and pledged US\$3.2 billion for the construction of a new hospital in the West Bank.¹¹⁵

When viewed with proper perspective the Sino-Israeli rapprochement appears less dramatic than it does at first sight. This is largely because the normalization process was gradual and consisted of what were considered as minor steps. The process began with a meeting of Chinese and Israeli diplomats in the United Nations. It was followed by the renewal of ties between the communist parties of the two countries and only later came the establishment of full diplomatic relations. China has yet to elevate its ties with Israel to the top level.

Initially, there was little ground for hostility between the two countries. Republican China was generally sympathetic to the Zionist enterprise and even the triumph of communism did not bring all contacts to an end. In fact, Israel was the one to miss the opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with China in the early 1950s. Whether friendship between the two countries would have survived the Six Day War or the Yom Kippur War is a matter of speculation. The fact remains, however, that China had demonstrated more flexibility and pragmatism than most Third World countries, which remained adamant that they were not prepared to deal with the Jewish state. It is particularly remarkable that China, whose leaders adopted communism and assumed the leadership of Third World countries and revolutionary movements, did not always rule out the possibility of establishing diplomatic ties with a state which their official propaganda had portrayed as reactionary and a tool of Western capitalist regimes. China's pragmatism appears all the more remarkable when one considers the fact that Israel did not have to sever its ties with Taiwan. Deng's government repeated warnings that China would not tolerate the establishment of friendly relations between Taiwan and any country friendly to China did not seriously impair relations with Israel. As long as Israel refrains from disputing China's right to Taiwan by openly supporting the sovereignty of the latter no serious rupture in Sino-Israeli relations is likely to occur.

China's commitment to supporting all revolutionary movements led to its involvement in the Middle East, and its support of the Palestinian movement increased considerably following the Six Day War. However, the Chinese became disillusioned when no progress in the solution to the Palestinian problem seemed imminent. Major changes occurred throughout the 1980s. China underwent a period of major domestic problems, which necessitated reform. Reliance on Western assistance seemed a welcome relief and a period of Sino-US rapprochement ensued, as a result of which Deng's government became friendlier to all US allies with the exception of Taiwan. In addition, the Chinese Politburo became less doctrinaire and more pragmatic. From China's point of view, Israel could offer arms, technical expertise, and most significant of all; the prospect of better relations with the United States.

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union added another dimension

to China's role in the Middle East. China sought to replace the Soviet Union as a major power in the region. The onset of the Middle East peace process provided the opportunity for Chinese mediation. However, the Israelis were determined to resist Chinese participation in the peace process before Deng's government agreed to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. All of these factors forced a major reassessment of Chinese foreign policy from which both countries benefited. The Israeli-Palestinian autonomy agreement brought the rapprochement between the two countries to new heights and, despite Washington's qualms regarding the military collaboration, the relations are likely to survive in the foreseeable future. China's reaction to the Intifada al-Aqsa was moderate at best and the even though Chinese leaders criticized Israel's policy, their official statements regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained impeccably balanced in order to avoid antagonizing Israel and to continue benefiting from its technology.

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Japan—Overcoming the Arab Boycott

Unlike Israel's relations with China in which ideological considerations played a significant role during the Maoist era, Israel's relations with Japan were marred mainly by economic considerations. Japan's primary reason for keeping Israel at a distance was its dependence on Arab oil and its desire to secure Middle Eastern markets. Japan's tendency to find favor in the eyes of the Arab countries manifested itself not only in its anti-Israeli votes in the United Nations but also in its willingness to abide by the regulations of the Arab boycott. Moreover, the Japanese government deliberately discouraged private companies from concluding commercial deals with Israel. Japan's compliance with the demands of the Arab states increased after the Yom Kippur War, when OPEC members began using oil as a political weapon against all countries sympathetic to Israel. Yet, barely a decade later, Japan's leaders came to the conclusion that their uneven Middle Eastern policy had not paid them handsome dividends, particularly since they aspired to improve relations with the United States, Israel's supporter and most trusted ally.

A close examination of Israeli-Japanese relations reveals that the change in Japan's policy toward Israel was a result of pragmatic considerations and that Tokyo viewed its relations with Israel largely through the prism of Japanese-US relations. Japan's relations with Israel were not as decidedly pro-Arab or pro-Israeli as they might have seemed to the observer. Moreover, the oil crisis that followed the Yom Kippur War did not produce such a radical change in Japanese Middle East foreign policy as has hitherto been assumed. The pro-Arab tendency in Japanese foreign policy was evident prior to 1973 and the subsequent oil crisis merely accentuated that trend. Similarly, the visit by Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu on 4 April 1991 to Los Angeles, where he met President George Bush and mentioned his country's new attitude toward Israel, was less of a turning point in Japan's attitude toward Israel than many observers believed. Even the widely publicized announcement made by the Toyota car company shortly afterwards that it would no longer boycott Israel, did not constitute a radical turning point. A far more significant turning point in Japanese-Israeli relations occurred in the mid-1980s, when tension in US-Japanese relations forced the Japanese government into a reassessment of its Middle East policy.

This chapter argues that Japan's belated rapprochement with Israel was not only a result of its pro-Arab policy but also of a lack of adequate efforts by Israel to reach Tokyo. It was not until the mid-1980s that Israel embarked on a serious drive to reach out to Tokyo. What accounts for Israel's indifference was Japan's Asian character, its location in the Far East and the fact that it did not have a large Jewish population. The bilateral relations suffered from the general neglect of Asian countries that characterized Israeli foreign policy for many years. Moreover, an analysis of Israeli foreign policy

reveals that the Foreign Ministry gave priority to countries with large concentrations of Jews. Consequently, relations with Japan did not loom large on the Foreign Ministry's agenda during the early days of the Jewish state. In order to understand the difficulties involved in reaching Tokyo it is necessary to trace the bilateral relations from the beginning.

As legend would have it, the Japanese are the descendants of one of the Israelite Ten Lost Tribes. Myths and legends, however, do not lead to rapprochement between countries. Like other Asian countries, the Japanese sought material and political gain and arguments about common history and heritage could hardly convince them to change their Middle East policy. Sporadic attempts to establish connections between the two countries were made not only by traders and profiteers but also by individuals who were moved by a sense of religious mission. The most memorable of these was an attempt made shortly before the Second World War by the Christian Japanese priest, Reverend Tamaki Atsuki, to establish cordial relations between Japan and the Jews of Palestine. Atsuki later established a Japanese movement whose members advocated friendship with Israel. Explaining the purpose of his mission, Atsuki told his followers that in 1938 he heard the voice of God telling him about the forthcoming rebirth of the Jewish people and the gathering of diaspora Jews. Ever since, he had been dedicated to the Jewish cause.¹ Admirable as his intentions were, his activities did little to establish cordial relations between the two countries. Even the Japanese government's scheme to rescue Jewish refugees during the Holocaust did little to promote mutual understanding.² Moreover, the fact that Japan had a small Jewish community diminished its importance in the eyes of the Israelis. The efforts of the Israeli Foreign Ministry during the first decade of the state's existence were invested in countries with large concentrations of Jews in an attempt to encourage their immigration to Israel. Therefore, no serious attempt to establish strong ties with Japan was made. Moreover, Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War had demonized its image in the eyes of many Israelis and discouraged rapprochement.³ The Japanese appeared even less interested in Israel in those days. In an interview with Jacob Wirtschafter of the *Jerusalem Post*, Japan's Ambassador to Israel, Sadakazu Taniguchi confessed, 'On the part of the Japanese, to be frank, we have no strong sentiment in favor of or against the Jewish people. In their notion, in their belief, the existence of the Jew does not occupy all that big a place in their mind.'⁴ This sense of estrangement persisted even after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. It stemmed not only from ignorance but also from experience, which many Japanese had with Israelis. Many Japanese businessmen who had the opportunity to conduct business with Israelis regarded them as greedy individuals lacking sensitivity and concern for their fellow Japanese, as Taniguchi said, 'I didn't think the Jewish people were serious enough in their efforts to understand Japan. They tend to expect a quick fix and they are so anxious to see the cash register ringing the next day.'⁵

Despite this lack of understanding, contact between the two countries was established in 1951, when an Israeli trading mission arrived in Tokyo and established the foundations for future cooperation. In May 1952, Japan recognized the State of Israel.⁶ However, formal relations between the two countries remained cold. When Golda Meir visited Tokyo in March 1952, the newspaper *Sankei* wrote that officials in the Japanese Foreign

Ministry were concerned about Arab reaction. The newspaper added that although the Foreign Ministry would have liked to hold a grand reception for the Israeli guest it would refrain from doing so due to Egyptian pressure.⁷ Nevertheless, Golda Meir's visit helped strengthen the bilateral ties and in 1953 the Israeli legation was turned into an embassy. However, the Japanese government remained unwilling to lose its lucrative markets in the Arab world and many Japanese firms preferred to ignore Israel. Thus for example, Israeli members were excluded from the Japanese delegation headed by S.Asao, President of Nippon Yusen Kaisha, who visited Egypt and other Arab countries in the winter of 1953.⁸ By then Japan had already established cordial relations with the Arab states and according to an Iraqi source it offered them arms of various kinds.⁹

In October 1953, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were informed regarding Mitsubishi's offer to sell arms to the Arabs.¹⁰ Moreover, the Japanese government expressed its willingness to establish diplomatic relations with the Arab countries and to open embassies there. At the same time, officials in Tokyo delayed the opening of a Japanese legation in Israel. Japan's Ministry for International Trade and Industry had openly stated that it opposed the opening of a legation in Israel due to its fear that the Arabs would resent such a move. This was probably the reason why Kohei Teraoka, the Special Assistant to the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, chose to wait until the legations in Iraq and Syria were open.¹¹ In order to keep a low profile in Japan's relations with Israel he suggested sending a secretary without special status from Ankara to Israel.¹² The Japanese government approved this temporary arrangement and after long debate it agreed to appoint Shinchi Kamimura as a Special Minister for Israel.¹³ The budget proposal presented by the Japanese Foreign Ministry included a recommendation to appoint a minister to Israel but Syrian pressure prevented the government from taking such step and a Charge d'Affaires was sent to Tel Aviv instead.¹⁴ It was only in the autumn of 1955 that the Japanese Foreign Ministry's budget was approved and that a decision to open a legation in Israel was made.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Japan established diplomatic relations with Jordan in June 1954.¹⁶ The opening of a Japanese embassy in Iraq was delayed due to Baghdad's demand that Japanese merchants who owed money to Jews evicted from Iraq pay the debts to the Iraqi government.¹⁷

By the mid-1950s, Japan's commercial relations with the Arab states were advancing in leaps and bounds. A Japanese bank was opened in Alexandria in December 1954.¹⁸ At the same time, relations between Japan and Israel were becoming increasingly strained. According to Egyptian sources the Arabs managed to convince Japan of the need to change its attitude toward Israel. Arab officials told their Japanese counterparts that they should not expect better relations with the Arab states unless they were willing to sever their connections with Israel. Consequently, the opening of the Israeli legation in Tokyo, scheduled for June 1955, was delayed.¹⁹

When Israel asked for Japanese support for its candidacy as a member of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization at the Eighth World Health Assembly held in Mexico City in May 1955, an official in the Japanese Foreign Ministry wrote that it

has the honor to inform the Legation that the Japanese government regrets very much to be unable to comply with the request of the government of Israel, because it had received a similar request from another country of the WHO in

the Eastern Mediterranean Region and already promised the support of the candidature thereof, prior to Israel's request.²⁰

Following a visit by some Arab leaders to Tokyo in the spring of 1955, the Japanese became even more reluctant to trade with Israel. Concerned by the increasing number of Japanese companies who yielded to Arab pressure, the Israeli Legation in Tokyo sent a letter to Jerusalem, which read in part:

We have received information that as a result of the talks with the visiting Arab leaders, a number of Japanese companies are becoming reluctant to entertain business suggestions from Israel. Wire dispatches announcing the blacklisting of ships carrying cargo to Israel which are published from time to time in the economic press here, increase that reluctance.²¹

By the spring of 1955, Japan's trade with Arab countries had reached impressive dimensions. The estimated value of Japanese imports was US\$360,000 from Iraq, US\$70,000 from Jordan, US\$3,000 from Libya, US\$19,756,000 from Saudi Arabia, US\$6,504,000 from Egypt, US\$250,000 from Syria and US\$64,000 from Yemen. The estimated value of Japanese exports to these countries was US\$8,900,000 to Iraq, US\$470,000 to Jordan, US\$230,000 to Libya, US\$1,633,000 to Saudi Arabia, US\$4,900,000 to Egypt, US\$261,000 to Lebanon and US\$712,000 to Syria.²² When the Israelis approached Mitsubishi's representatives regarding the possibility of a joint venture to extract salt in Israel the latter expressed their anxiety about possible trouble with the Arabs.²³ In the summer of 1955, Mitsubishi negotiated with the Egyptian government the supply of 3.5-inch rocket shells produced by Nihon Kentetsu and rocket projectors made by Shin Meiwa Kogyo.²⁴ In addition, the Egyptians ordered three ships from Osaka Shipbuilding Company, one 3,000-ton dredger and two 1,350-ton tugboats.²⁵ Attempting to allay Israel's fears, the President of the Upper House of the Japanese Parliament reassured the Israeli Legation in Tokyo that Mitsubishi's arms deal with Egypt would not materialize since the Egyptians had already received enough arms from communist countries and Japanese producers had more orders than they could possibly handle.²⁶ The Egyptians, however, were keen on buying ships from Japan and ordered an additional 650-ton tugboat.²⁷ Unwilling to be excluded from the Japanese market Israel ordered US\$30 million-worth of war materials shortly afterwards. The sale of these items was bitterly opposed by the socialists and other left-wing politicians who argued that this could escalate the tension in the region.²⁸

When an Egyptian trade mission visited Japan in July 1956, its members raised again the issue of arms procurement from Japan. When asked by a journalist whether Israel would be able to purchase arms similar to those that Egypt asked for, a Japanese Foreign Ministry official said that this would be very difficult because Japan must take into consideration Arab reaction. He did not conceal his government's pragmatic approach, saying that there is only one Israel and many Arab states. When asked whether Japan would not be violating the balance of power in the Middle East by supplying weapons to the Arab states he replied that the danger had receded since the Soviet Union had already declared its intention to establish peace in the region.²⁹ The sense of pessimism regarding the future of the bilateral relations that prevailed in government and Foreign Ministry

circles in Jerusalem had a negative impact on Israel's efforts to approach the Japanese. Nevertheless, when asked to support Japan's candidacy to international organizations Israel was forthcoming. Its support of Japan's candidacy as a member of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization at the tenth session of the Organization's Assembly, in Caracas in June 1956, was one of its numerous acts of good will toward Japan.³⁰ In an interview with the Japanese journalist Tatsuo Shibata, Golda Meir said, 'With Japan, which is of course far advanced, Israel seeks friendship, cooperation, development of trade and cultural ties. We are young and naive enough to want friends wherever possible.'³¹

Japan had been interested in Israeli technical know-how since the early days of the state's establishment but fear of Arab response discouraged it from responding to Israeli offers of commercial dealings. Although they were aware of Japan's need to be sensitive to Arab response, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials complained that Tokyo's reaction was highly exaggerated. For example, in one of his letters to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem the First Secretary of the Israeli Legation in Tokyo writes:

The Japanese exaggerate regarding the Arab Boycott as well. A Japanese company such as Mitsubishi is not even willing to sell merchandise to an Israeli firm, and there are many companies that are taking the same position. According to officials in the Japanese Foreign Ministry, the Arabs demand more from the Japanese than from Europeans or Americans. Even if this is not true, the fact is that Japanese firms tend to interpret the Boycott's regulations in the broadest fashion.³²

Other officials in the Israeli Legation shared this sense of Japanese fear. One of them said, 'There is almost no conversation with the Japanese in which their fear of Arab response is not mentioned.'³³ Fear of Arab reaction had a stifling effect on the bilateral relations. Not only did it affect the manner in which the Japanese traded with Israel but also their political and military deals with it. It is hardly surprising that only in 1963, after intense efforts on the part of the Israelis, did the Japanese government agree to the appointment of an Israeli military attaché, in Tokyo, and it was only after a visit by the Israeli Chief of Staff and the Defense Ministry's general director that Tokyo agreed to the appointment. When Colonel Hanan Gior was appointed military attaché Japanese officials indicated that they were interested in the possibility of purchasing electronics and optical equipment from Israel.³⁴ However, Arab pressure was relentless and in the summer of 1965, Hiakawa Company decided to yield to the boycott's regulations. A spokesman for the company said that for 'reasons of race and conscience' it was compelled to yield to the boycott and decided to cancel its contracts with Israeli companies.³⁵

When confronted by Israeli officials regarding the surrender of their companies to the Arab boycott, Japanese Foreign Ministry officials used to pretend that they were unaware of such practice.³⁶ However, when it came to their government's political attitude toward Israel these officials tended to be more candid. A member of the Japanese mission to the United Nations had once announced that Japan would not be able to increase its influence there without the support of the Afro-Asian nations and that in order to gain that support

it had to maintain a common position with them on the questions of Palestine and apartheid.³⁷ Officials in the Japanese Foreign Ministry argued that their government was seeking to maintain neutrality in the Arab-Israeli dispute and that in their view the solution to conflict lay in the implementation of UN resolutions pertaining to Palestine.³⁸

When the Arab League opened its offices in Tokyo in 1966, the Israelis voiced their concern to the Japanese that this event would intensify Arab activities and harm Israel's interests. However, what the Arab League regarded as a success proved to be a double-edged sword because it encouraged pro-Israeli officials to argue that the presence of the Arab League resulted in a pro-Arab bias in Japan. Concerned about the negative impact which the presence of the Arab League could have on Japan's image as an objective player in world affairs, these officials called for an even-handed policy toward the Middle East. Eban's visit to Tokyo at the beginning of 1967 brought the two countries closer. Japan agreed to cooperate with Israel in the cultural, scientific and educational fields, but politically Tokyo was much more cautious—it adhered to strict neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran in May 1967, Japan preferred that the United Nations handle the problem and did not support any action by the great powers. Yet despite its sympathy for the Arab states, Japan did not yield to their pressure to sever its ties with Israel after the Six Day War. Two resolutions were debated in the United Nations in the aftermath of the Six Day War, the anti-Israeli resolution sponsored by Yugoslavia and the more moderate resolution sponsored by Latin American countries. Japan voted in favor of both; however at the same time it called for Arab recognition of Israel. A statement, which appeared in the *Japan Times* on 9 November 1967, read in part,

While we fully appreciate the dangerous nature of the present situation, it appears to us that the fundamental difficulty that dominates any attempt to find a solution is the refusal of the Arabs to recognize Israel as a sovereign state. This we think, is a prior necessity to any kind of negotiations for a peaceful settlement, even if the United Nations takes on a major role.

An editorial in the same paper stated, 'The point that the Arabs generally fail to understand is that Israel cannot reasonably be expected to go back to the situation in the Middle East as it was at the beginning of last May.' Similar expressions of sympathy appeared when the Egyptians sank an Israeli ship in the Mediterranean.³⁹ A statement made by Prime Minister Isako Sato, who met Saudi Arabia's King Faisal in Tokyo in 1971, provided further evidence of Japan's neutral policy. The Prime Minister expressed hope for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on UN Security Council Resolution 242. He added that the Palestinian question should be solved in a just manner and that the rights of all parties involved should be guaranteed.⁴⁰

The Yom Kippur War led to an oil embargo by the OPEC members and caused a severe energy crisis in Japan. Yet even then, when the Arab states seemed to have greater leverage on its decision-making, Tokyo did not go as far as severing its ties with Israel. The Japanese government came to the realization that Israel was a convenient place from which it could observe the events in the Arab world and Soviet activities in the region. The Japanese government sympathized with the plight of the Palestinians; however,

unlike China, it never strongly denounced Israel and the argument common in Chinese official rhetoric that Israel was a tool of US imperialism was rarely heard in Japanese official circles. Moreover, the Japanese government refrained from supporting terrorism, Palestinian or otherwise. In fact, it sought to disassociate itself from all terrorist activities. For example, the terrorist act in Lod Airport in 1972, in which Kozo Okamoto and two other Japanese terrorists took part, was strongly denounced by the Japanese government. In a letter sent to Golda Meir in early June of that year, Japan's Prime Minister Sato said:

I have the honor to send Your Excellency my most sincere greetings through Mr Kenji Fukunaga, a member of the House of Representatives, whom I am dispatching to your country as Ambassador on Special Mission. Through him I hasten to express to you and the government and people of Israel my profound apology on behalf of the government and people of Japan for the dastardly act of terrorism committed by three Japanese nationals at Lod Airport, which must have caused indescribable anger and sadness among your people... It was an act of insanity beyond the comprehension of the Japanese people, who have been angered and saddened, no less than any other people in the world, at the crime of the three who brought such disgrace on them. We are determined to do our utmost to prevent a recurrence of such a crime... For the consolation of the injured and the families of the deceased, I am considering taking appropriate action. I read the news with deep gratitude that you stated in the Knesset that Israel did not regard the criminals as representative of Japan and that the friendly relations between Israel in Japan would remain unimpaired. That is also what I believe.⁴¹

Fearful of the impact that this apology could have on the Arab states the Japanese government sent its representatives to reassure the Arabs that Japanese foreign policy had not changed in Israel's favor. The Japanese were reported to have apologized to the Arab governments for apologizing to the Israelis.⁴² The events that followed the Yom Kippur War had forced upon the Japanese a reassessment of their Middle East policy. Government officials and bureaucrats of the Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for International Trade and Industry became increasingly involved in debating Japan's policy toward the Middle East. Moreover, the business community was frequently given the opportunity to express its views about the Middle East. Japanese intellectuals, some of whom were anti-Western and identified with Asian nationalism, sought to promote the Arab cause. Keidanren, the Federation of Economic Organizations, began a campaign to exert more pressure on the Japanese government to distance itself from Israel.

On 22 November 1973, the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary, Nikaido Susumu, who was aware of the danger of an Arab oil embargo on Japan, stated, 'The Government of Japan will continue to observe the situation in the Middle East with grave concern and, depending on future developments, may have to reconsider its policy toward Israel.'⁴³ Instrumental in this shift was the Japanese 'Red Army' which maintained contact with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and terrorized members of Japanese communes who sought to maintain contact with Israel.⁴⁴ This shift in foreign policy, however, had its limitations since the Japanese government could not afford to

alienate the United States.⁴⁵ Government officials feared that a radical shift in policy against Israel might not be well received in Washington. In addition, Japanese government officials attributed considerable weight to the Jewish lobby and its influence on US foreign policy. In response to Saudi Oil Minister Shaikh Zaki Yamani's hint that Japan would have to sever its ties with Israel in order to continue to benefit from an uninterrupted flow of Arab oil, the pro-American Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira said, 'Japan cannot survive without the trust of other nations.'⁴⁶

Initially, Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka kowtowed to Arab pressure. However, Japan's shift to the Arab side had triggered heavy criticism in the West. A foreign observer had noted that Japan moved 'from disdainful indifference to sycophantic solicitude'.⁴⁷ US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had criticized Japan's new policy saying, 'They claimed neither justice nor wisdom for their course of action.'⁴⁸ The new policy, he said, 'reflected necessity and was thus beyond debate'.⁴⁹ In the final analysis, the fear of alienating the United States and the European countries forced upon the Japanese a reassessment of foreign policy. Therefore, the Foreign Ministry asked Deputy Prime Minister Miki Takeo, who was on his way to the Middle East on 10 December 1973, to avoid mentioning the statement regarding the need to reassess Japanese foreign policy toward the Middle East so as not to offend Israel and its ally, the United States.⁵⁰ In his meeting with Egyptian officials, Miki Takeo said that his government opposed the occupation of territories by force and supported the restoration of Palestinian rights. However, he did not mention whether or not his government would reassess its policy toward Israel.⁵¹

Japan took steps which demonstrated greater concern for the Arab cause without showing open hostility to Israel. What appeared as a sudden departure in Japan's attitude toward the Arabs was merely a culmination of existing policy.⁵² Japan's contribution of US\$140 million to clean and expand the Suez Canal was meant to demonstrate greater concern for the Arab cause without alienating Israel.⁵³ However, this contribution was motivated by Japan's desire to have easier access to Middle Eastern ports. In September 1978, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda visited Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. This was the first time that a Japanese Prime Minister ever visited the region. However, Japanese policy did not change as radically as it seemed at that time. Although Japan condemned Israel in the United Nations and expressed sympathy with the Palestinians, it never supported anti-Israeli draft resolutions.⁵⁴ The Japanese move was calculated to produce an image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. But the Japanese government did not always succeed in its efforts to portray an image of honest broker in the conflict and its interference in Middle Eastern affairs often led to unexpected results. Thus for example, Arafat's visit to Japan, which came just a few days after Sadat's assassination, was particularly embarrassing for the Japanese government because the PLO praised the assassins. When criticized by Jewish and Israeli critics for having made no serious attempt to bring an end to the adherence of Japanese companies to the Arab boycott, the government responded that it had no control over them. Ignoring the fact that the government could not always control the actions of private companies, the critics remained skeptical.

This state of affairs continued until the 1980s. The change in Japan's attitude started to manifest itself at that time largely because the Iraq-Iran War had demonstrated to the

Japanese that Iran, and not Israel was the most immediate threat to the Arabs.⁵⁵ When the Israel-Japan Parliamentary Friendship League was formed in February 1984, Kimche announced that this was a significant step in the bilateral relations.⁵⁶ The United States had become increasingly active in the Middle East and any Japanese action that could have minimized the effectiveness of the US role in the region had to be reconsidered.

In their attempt to understand the motives behind the change in Japan's Middle East policy some observers sought to refute the notion that Tokyo's foreign policy was a mere by-product of economic considerations.⁵⁷ Yet Japan's relations with Israel had proven that economic reasons were crucial in the formulation of Japanese foreign policy. The result of the postwar oil glut and the falling prices made it less imperative for Japan to rely on the Arabs, and rapprochement with Israel became less risky. In September 1985, Foreign Minister Shamir visited Tokyo and the commercial dealings between the two countries increased considerably. In the autumn of 1987, they exchanged trade missions. Foreign Minister Sosuke Uno was the first high-ranking Japanese official to visit Israel. However, unwilling to give the Arab states the impression that the visit would adversely affect their relations with Japan, he visited Syria, Jordan, Egypt and even met PLO representatives, reassuring his hosts that Japan's policy had not changed. This was calculated to earn Japan the maximum economic benefits. As one observer put it, 'The trip was classic Japanese strategy, maintaining good diplomatic relations with both sides in order to maximize economic ties with both.'⁵⁸

Herzog's participation in the funeral of Emperor Showa in February 1989 had further intensified the cooperation between the two countries. New developments in the Middle East occurred and these proved that the Arab world was far less united than anyone thought. For many years the Pan-Arab sentiment was strong in the Middle East, uniting the Arab states and helping to maintain a common front against all their enemies. Consequently, the Arab boycott was quite effective. But as Bernard Lewis, the eminent historian of the Middle East has argued, Pan-Arabism had been on the decline for quite some time,⁵⁹ making it easier for other countries to seek better relations with Israel. Reacting to US pressure to share the cost of global security, Japan began to be interested in playing an important role in the Middle East peace process. The Japanese had taken advantage of Arab disunity by increasing their trade with Israel. Consequently, the volume of trade increased from US\$600 million in 1985 to US\$1.4 billion by the end of the decade.⁶⁰

Although the Japanese government kept a distance from Israel for all these years and maintained a dialogue with Arafat from the early 1980s onwards, it refused to regard the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.⁶¹ Even the Intifada, which was highly publicized in the Japanese press, did not lead to a drastic change in Japan's Middle East policy. However, the Japanese government remained quite loyal to the Arab boycott for many years. Although Japanese firms had considerable freedom, the government tried to control their activities through a system of 'administrative guidance' designed to ensure that the private sector would not violate the Arab boycott and thus jeopardize Japanese interests in the Arab world.⁶²

The turning point in the bilateral relations came in the autumn of 1987, when the two countries exchanged trade missions. This exchange, according to informed observers, could not have taken place without the knowledge of the Japanese government.⁶³

However, even when the Japanese government became receptive to the idea of rapprochement with Israel, relations remained cool. This was partially due to the anti-Semitic wave which engulfed Japan in 1986, when the Christian Minister Masami Uno published three books putting forward the argument that Jews were aspiring to world domination and that international Jewry conspired against Japan in an attempt to destroy its economy. Numerous copies of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the author of which argued that the Jews were conspiring to dominate the world, were to be found on the bookshelves in Japanese stores.

The appearance of such literature obviously had much to do with the fact that, despite the country's economic growth, domestic conditions in Japan did not improve significantly.⁶⁴ In the public image, Jews became simultaneously an object of hatred and admiration.⁶⁵ Thus for example, Den Fujita, President of McDonald's hamburger chain in Japan, argued in his book *Jewish Business Methods: Controlling the Economy of the World*, that the Jews were exploiting the Japanese but at the same time called upon the Japanese to learn from the Jews and emulate them. Paradoxically, the anti-Jewish propaganda led to a greater desire to learn from the Jews and their methods. Fujita argued that Japan had to become familiar with Jewish methods if it wished to improve its relations with the United States, which was in the same predicament.

The anti-Jewish propaganda had a negative impact only on ordinary Japanese, who had no other source of information on Jews and Judaism. Japanese intellectuals had long argued that, unlike the masses, they were free from the impact of anti-Semitism and xenophobia although some of them did imbibe such distorted ideas and took part in the anti-Jewish campaign. There was no unanimity of opinion regarding the extent of the anti-Jewish bias. However, despite the anti-Jewish propaganda, the Japanese government did not become entirely pro-Arab. The Japanese Foreign Ministry was pursuing what one official described as a 'diplomatic equilibrium policy'.⁶⁶ When Uno announced that he would be the first Foreign Minister to visit Israel and that a 'new phase' in the bilateral relations had begun⁶⁷ there was hope in Jerusalem that Japan would quickly move ahead with the normalization process. However, Arab officials stepped up their diplomatic efforts to dissuade Tokyo from rapprochement with Israel. Responding to their pressure, Japanese officials said that the visit was routine and had no far-reaching implications,⁶⁸ while attempting to ward off Arab criticism by saying that the visit was aimed at improving Japan's relations with the United States.⁶⁹ Be that as it may, the mere fact that for the first time a Japanese Foreign Minister had publicly announced that he intended to visit Israel was a significant departure from Japan's traditional Middle East policy. Tokyo reduced its dependence on Arab oil-producing countries by adopting a comprehensive security policy whose objective was to purchase oil from other sources. Consequently, it managed to weaken their bargaining position.⁷⁰

In an interview with Menachem Shalev, Israel's Foreign Ministry Director Avraham Tamir argued that Japan's tough rhetoric regarding Israel's need to withdraw from Arab land and to restore Palestinian rights was meant to pacify the Arab states. He argued that Japan supported the moderate Shultz Plan and was in favor of an Israeli federation with Jordan. Tamir, who empathized with Japan's low-profile policy in the Middle East, argued that despite its pro-Arab rhetoric Japan had increased its commercial dealings with Israel. Between 1985 and 1988 Israeli exports to Japan increased from US\$209

million to about US\$700 million, two-thirds of which were in diamonds. Overall, the total volume of trade between the two countries increased from US\$600 million in 1985 to US\$1.2 billion in 1988.⁷¹ However, the Japanese were still not ready to come forward with a proposal to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Furthermore, they linked the improvement of the bilateral relations to progress in the Middle East peace process, a linkage which was criticized by Peres during Uno's visit to Israel and the Arab states.⁷² Israel's suppression of the Intifada discouraged the Japanese from accelerating the normalization process.⁷³ At the same time, Japan's relations with the PLO improved considerably. In October 1989, Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki invited Arafat to Tokyo and promised him financial aid.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Israeli-Japanese relations were far from being hostile and the contacts were conducted in a friendly atmosphere.

The change in Japan's attitude toward Israel can be attributed in part to Tokyo's desire to improve its image in Washington whose policy, as the Japanese saw it, was highly influenced by the existence of a powerful Jewish lobby.⁷⁵ The Japanese attached considerable importance to Israel's connections with Washington and sought to capitalize on them, and Japanese officials called upon the government to take this factor into consideration. For example, Masaaki Nakayama, Japan's Minister of Posts and Telecommunications who later became the Secretary General of the Japan-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Association, was reported to have said,

The Jews own all the 'seven sisters'. They control agriculture in America and the international precious metals market. Both George Bush and Michael Dukakis are related to Jews... I am trying to educate my fellow Japanese that even though there is only one Israel against 22 Arab nations, if you bash Israel, you are actually bashing 14.5 million Jews all over the world.⁷⁶

Although the private sector in Japan continued to trade with Israel, no publicity was given to such contacts. Trade was carried out indirectly through other nations and false companies and whenever the Arabs found out that goods were shipped or received the Japanese companies ceased the trade completely. Thus for example, in 1980 the agricultural cooperative Zenno, which imported potash from the Dead Sea for nearly three decades, announced its intention to comply with the Arab boycott and terminated all its dealings with Israel.⁷⁷

The relative freedom that Japan exercised in foreign policy can be partially attributed to the manner in which it handled its economic partners in the Arab world. The Japanese government never went to the extent of telling the Arab oil suppliers what its next political move would be but it signaled that pressure by any other Arab oil-exporting country might force it to favor regional allies. Japan's ability to maneuver was in large measure due to its ingenious planning. As Burrow and Kurdle explained:

The Japanese overwhelmingly directed aid and investment in energy suppliers toward projects that promised a continued stake in country-to-country cooperation. Some of these projects involved infrastructure development that would orient the supplier's economy (and thus regime success) toward continued exports of energy to Japan (and we have argued that Japan would typically be a hard market to replace in the short run).⁷⁸

Although Japan's rapprochement with Israel was largely a consequence of financial considerations there were political factors, which could be overlooked. Above all, the Japanese government sought better relations with the United States and there was a strong conviction in Tokyo that Jewish pressure groups could help promote Japan's interests in Washington. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that these groups played a significant role in softening Tokyo's attitude toward Israel. In February 1990, 100 American members of the Jewish Congress sent a letter to the Japanese government in which they denounced its adherence to the Arab boycott. When Japan's Ambassador to Washington, Novio Matsunaga, argued that his country could not afford to ignore the regulations of the boycott due to financial difficulties, Congress responded by saying that the reason given was 'extremely foolish'.⁷⁹

Although the Japanese government refrained from restricting Israeli commercial activities in Japan many companies have openly discriminated against Israel. Those most easily threatened by the Arab boycott were Nissan, Toyota, Mazda, Mitsui, C.Itoh, Nippon Steel, Hitachi and Canon.⁸⁰ Subaru has maintained normal trade relations with Israel since 1982 and it is only recently that Toyota and other companies have begun selling their products in Israel. An Israeli economic delegation visited Japan in February 1991, in order to discuss closer economic ties. Zvi Koren, the General Director of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, stated that the delegation went to Japan as a result of growing Japanese interest in joint ventures and investments in Israel.⁸¹ Japanese trade with Israel had tripled in the years between 1988 and 1991, reaching US\$718 million in exports and US\$546 million in imports in 1991.⁸²

The Gulf War demonstrated that Japanese foreign policy was pragmatic and not dictated by ideological considerations. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the Japanese government imposed a ban on trade with Iraq. The ban was imposed on all imports, exports, loans and investments. Moreover, Prime Minister Kaifu's visit to the Middle East was canceled. Japan contributed US\$13 billion, which amounted to 20 per cent of the total cost of the war against Iraq and after the war it sent six minesweepers to the Gulf.⁸³ These contributions have demonstrated that Japan's foreign policy goals have expanded significantly not only due to US pressure but also as a result of the growing expectation on the part of world public opinion that Japan should contribute to world peace. Japan's cooperation with the Western coalition led to better relations with Israel. Since many Arab states joined the Western coalition there was little risk of alienating Arab public opinion by identifying with Israel. As part of its campaign against Saddam Hussein's aggression, Japan denounced Iraq's Scud missile attacks on Israel.⁸⁴ Nahum Eshkol, a senior official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, has told the author that Israel's restraint was greatly appreciated in Tokyo.⁸⁵ However, despite its gratefulness, Tokyo made it clear that it would not include Israel in the list of those countries that participated in the Gulf War and thereby could be considered eligible for financial assistance, since 'Israel is relatively wealthy'.⁸⁶ Japan's unwillingness to consider Israel eligible for financial assistance triggered critical responses from Israelis and Jews, some of whom argued that Japan's tendency to surrender to Arab pressure and to enforce the boycott's regulations on Israel remained basically unchanged.⁸⁷

The improvement in the bilateral relations did not happen without significant pressure

being exerted by the Israelis. When Foreign Minister David Levy met Japan's Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe in Moscow in January 1992, he protested that the granting of landing rights to El Al aircraft has been delayed on the grounds that Tokyo's airport was overly crowded. In addition, he asked that Japanese banks be encouraged to provide credit to Israeli companies.⁸⁸ By the end of February 1993, Israel had been awarded a multi-annual credit line from the prestigious Japanese Sumitomo Bank. This was considered a significant breakthrough in the bilateral relations because it enabled Israel to obtain long-term loans on a regular basis. This achievement was made possible thanks to the efforts of Eliezer Yones of Israel's Treasury.⁸⁹

Israel had been pressuring Japanese banks to extend it a credit line particularly since its efforts to obtain US loan guarantees failed to produce immediate results. There was a major advantage in obtaining Japanese loans since they were not contingent upon Israel making political concessions. Nevertheless, the Arab boycott still caused concern among Japanese businessmen. In his meeting with Israel's Minister of Commerce and Industry Micha Harish, Masaya Miyoshi, President of Keidanren, Japan's most important business organization, said 'Manufacturers say that when they make purchases of strategic importance from Israel, those actions are listed in the Arab blacklist... Arab businessmen or lawyers try to exploit the situation and threaten the companies.'⁹⁰ Miyoshi argued that one of the reasons for the increasing trade contacts between the two countries was the G-7's decision to work against the Arab boycott. Furthermore, he said that if peace were to be established in the region he would consider moving his company's headquarters from Cairo to Tel Aviv. Miyoshi advised Israeli businessmen to build better personal relationships and trust among their trading Japanese partners.⁹¹

By the early 1990s it became abundantly clear that the Arab boycott had lost much of its potency. Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmed, Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister stated that, 'Kuwait and other Arab nations have abandoned the indirect boycott for reasons related to their own security.'⁹² Nevertheless, he added that lifting the direct boycott was still tied to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹³ The laxity of some of the Gulf States regarding the Arab boycott served as a green light for the Japanese to trade with Israel. Tokyo did not embark on open trade relations with Israel but it conveniently disregarded the boycott's regulations.

Japan's desire to play a greater role in Middle Eastern affairs manifested itself shortly after the Gulf War. Efforts were made to maintain cordial relations with both Israel and the Arabs. Israeli and Palestinian delegations were invited to Tokyo to discuss environmental and other issues affecting the Middle East. Japan offered US\$3 million in emergency aid for an international fund to help improve the conditions of Palestinians living in the occupied territories.⁹⁴ Moreover, loans were more readily provided to the Arab states and even Jordan, which could not offer oil to the Japanese, obtained generous financial assistance.⁹⁵ The Japanese, however, were not as altruistic as they would have liked their benefactors to believe. Their generosity toward Jordan earned them handsome dividends in Saudi Arabia. In January 1992, Japan and Saudi Arabia agreed on a petroleum co-processing venture in which Japan obtained 450,000 barrels of crude oil a day for refining in Japan.⁹⁶

By the early 1990s, Japan had become increasingly aware of the importance of acting as an honest broker in Middle Eastern affairs. On 18 May 1992, Middle Eastern

representatives were invited to Tokyo to discuss environmental issues. Japan's Foreign Minister Watanabe pledged that his country would make a contribution to peace in the Middle East.⁹⁷ He said that his government was in favor of arms reduction and the destruction of all nuclear warheads.⁹⁸ At the same time, the political and cultural contacts between Israel and Japan increased and the Japanese were becoming increasingly aware of Israel's problems. However, the bilateral relations were still marred by prejudice. Anti-Semitism, that never loomed large in the attitude of the Japanese government toward Israel, has intensified in recent years. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other books accusing the Jews of a plot to dominate the world increased dramatically.⁹⁹ One of Japan's main weekly news magazines, *Shukan Gendai* has published critical articles blaming American Jewry for using its financial power to manipulate President Clinton's policy in Israel's favor. Even some of the Japanese intellectuals were swept up in the anti-Jewish mood. Thus for example, Noboru Fujii, a former Harvard economist, argued that Jewish economists and politicians have long been persuading the American public to support policies favorable to Israel at the expense of needy countries.¹⁰⁰

The Israeli-Palestinian dialogue that began in earnest in the autumn of 1993 was of major interest to the Japanese. Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata said that he flew half way around the world to show Japan's 'determination to play a very important role' in implementing the historic Middle East accord.¹⁰¹ Yet despite the major breakthrough that had taken place the road to normal relations between the two countries remained arduous. The Japanese continued to maintain a distance from Israel due to Islamic pressure. When Israeli diplomats pressured the Japanese government to help end the Arab boycott, Hata refrained from making any commitments. In fact, he denied promising Israel that he would use his influence to help end the boycott, and only went as far as saying that the boycott had a negative impact on the peace process.¹⁰² The Japanese continued to face criticism not only from the Arabs but also from other countries hostile to Israel. Responding to a request by the United States and Israel that Japan use its economic leverage in order to reduce Iranian opposition to the autonomy deal with Arafat, the Iranian daily *Jomhuri Islami* called upon the Japanese government not to betray its nation's prestige to satisfy international Zionism.¹⁰³ It added that the Japanese who had experienced the horrors of the atomic bomb would certainly not want to see their country become a tool in the hands of the United States and the Zionists.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the bilateral relations improved during the mid-1990s, and when Japan was hit by an earthquake Israel offered to help. In May 1994, Japan's Foreign Minister Koji Kakizawa came to visit the Middle East. Kakizawa met Rabin who told him that if Japan were interested in contributing to the Middle East peace process it would have to pursue an even-handed policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Kakizawa, who pledged US\$200 to the Palestinian Authority, agreed. He promised to continue his country's struggle against the Arab boycott. However, in order to show impartiality in the Middle East conflict he met Mubarak and Palestinian leaders in Orient House.¹⁰⁵ Rabin visited Tokyo in December of that year. During the meeting the two countries agreed to look into the possibility of cooperation in security matters. Rabin announced that Japanese companies would be allowed to invest in the Israeli stock market and asked the Japanese government to consider purchasing electronic warfare equipment in Israel and to finance water projects in Jordan. The Japanese government expressed an interest in obtaining Israeli support in

their efforts to become a permanent member in the UN Security Council.¹⁰⁶ An aviation agreement between the two countries was negotiated; however, its conclusion was delayed due to Japan's insistence that Israel pay the expenses of the security devices planned for the aircraft.¹⁰⁷

When negotiations between Israel and Syria on the future of the Golan Heights began, the Japanese government looked into the possibility of sending a peacekeeping force. Japan agreed to send a contingent of 50 soldiers to be stationed along the Israeli-Syrian border. This was not only a sign of Tokyo's resolve to improve the bilateral relations but also a part of its overall effort to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Tokyo's attempt to improve relations with the PLO was undoubtedly a part of this grand design. Officials in the Japanese Foreign Ministry denied that the government transferred US\$42 million to the PLO; however, they stated that foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority was being considered.¹⁰⁸

By the mid-1990s commercial relations between the two countries had expanded to such an extent that major Japanese high-tech companies became keenly interested in dealing with Israel. In October 1995, Kozo Nishimura, Vice President of the multimedia company NSW, arrived in Israel. According to Nishimura, who regarded Israel as the future 'Silicon Valley of the East', Israeli companies came close to controlling 40 percent of the Japanese multimedia market.¹⁰⁹ A clear indication that the Japanese were warming to Israel was the intensification of the cultural exchange between the two countries. One of the highest awards at the Yamagata Film Festival, held in October 1995, was given to the Israeli producer, Tsipi Reibenbach for her film *The Choice and the Destiny*. This was the first time that an Israeli producer had been allowed to take part in that competition.¹¹⁰

Another sign of improved relations between the two countries was a visit by Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama on 17 September 1995. The visit was regarded in Israel as a clear indication that in Japanese foreign policy Israel had become a factor to be reckoned with. As the *Jerusalem Post* foreign correspondent put it: 'It is clear that Japan has at last to face the inevitable. There is no place to hide in a shrinking world, and Murayama's tour was a clear sign that the Middle East peace process—whatever its outcome—is not going to leave Japan out in the cold of ignorance.'¹¹¹ Commenting on Murayama's visit one editorial stated: 'Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama's visit, which follows Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's trip to Tokyo last year, is an important sign that Israel at last has a firm place in Japan's foreign policy.'¹¹² Murayama stated that his government would continue in its efforts to promote peace in the region.¹¹³ Commenting on Rabin's assassination that occurred several weeks after his visit, Murayama said that the event was a personal tragedy and a 'huge loss to the Middle East peace process'.¹¹⁴

Israeli-Japanese relations were adversely affected by the negative image of Israelis flocking to Japan in search of quick profits. The practice of selling art objects and paintings in the streets of Tokyo, without license, turned the Israelis into an object of contempt in the eyes of many Japanese. The Japanese, said Amos Ganor, Israel's Ambassador in Japan, regard every Israeli as a 'potential criminal'. The real problem, according to Ganor was that 'Since Israelis have become unwanted here, immigration officials keep away good Israeli businessmen arriving here, precisely because of these non law abiding young men.' Ganor lamented the fact that the image of the Israelis in Japan suffered, saying:

This has adverse effect on the image and reputation of Israel which constantly struggles for the Japanese market. Japan is Israel's second largest market after the United States, with a volume of trade totaling one and a quarter billion dollars. But the negative image of the Israelis in Japanese eyes has a devastating effect on business.¹¹⁵

In light of the changing realities of world politics and Japan's emphasis on economic progress the bilateral relations are not likely to deteriorate in the foreseeable future. However, misunderstanding caused by the different erent mentalities of both countries would continue to stand in the way of further progress. Fashioned by a long history of propaganda campaigns, the image of the Jew in the Japanese mind is unlikely to change in the immediate future. Fictitious stories about Jews used by extremist organizations and political parties from both the left and right wings of the Japanese political spectrum have left a deep impression on the Japanese mentality. The image of the conspiratorial Jew seeking to exploit the Japanese people was reinforced by numerous anti-Semitic publications. Evidence that anti-Jewish sentiment persists in Japan, particularly in times of economic difficulties, abounds. The economic insecurity of the early 1990s produced another wave of anti-Jewish propaganda. Occasionally, Jews are blamed for collaborating with the freemasons in order to control Japanese society. Copies of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are still available in the markets and anti-Jewish slogans are still to be seen in Japan's major cities. Some Japanese are even swayed by the notion that the Holocaust never took place. In their book *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa have argued that the decline of the ideological left and the rise of liberal forces within Japan created a better atmosphere for improved relations with Israel. Yet at the same time they demonstrate that worsening economic conditions led to a resurgence of anti-Semitic literature in Japan.¹¹⁶ It is difficult to assess the impact of this phenomenon on Israeli-Japanese relations. Oddly enough, Israelis are not always identified with Jews. It is safe to assume, however, that as long as Japan continues to reap economic benefits from its Israeli connection the relationship between the two countries will remain cordial.

A thorough analysis of Israeli-Japanese relations reveals that although Israel was interested in diplomatic relations with Japan little was done by Israeli Foreign Ministry officials to promote the bilateral relations. Unwilling to sacrifice its commercial ties with the Arab states, Japan maintained a distance from Israel. The oil crisis of 1973 underscored Japan's need to maintain normal relations with the Arab states. The Japanese government's main concern was economic and there was little genuine concern for justice in the Middle East or for the fate of the Palestinians. It was only during the 1980s, after Tokyo began to sense that the Pan-Arab threat was more apparent than real, that a breakthrough in the bilateral relations became possible. Several other factors allowed the Japanese to warm to Israel without recriminations. The beginning of the Middle East peace process made rapprochement less risky. When the Arab countries began to negotiate with Israel it was no longer possible for them to criticize Tokyo for its ties with Israel, and Japanese companies found it easier to deal with Israel without fear of retaliation. Neither the so-called 'common characteristics' nor the existence of strong anti-Semitic sentiment in Japan had a decisive impact on the bilateral relations. The

Japanese government was moved by the practical need to promote prosperity at home and to enhance Japan's position in the international arena. In an attempt to avoid any serious damage to its economy and world-power status, Tokyo skillfully managed to adjust its Middle East policy according to the pressures of the moment. The adroitness of Japanese foreign policy manifested itself on several occasions: during the 1950s when it sought commercial opportunities in Middle Eastern markets and therefore maintained a distance from Israel, and after the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil crisis which placed its economy in jeopardy and caused it to alienate itself even further from Israel. Japan's pragmatism manifested itself again during the early 1980s, when its leaders witnessed the decline of Pan-Arabism and concluded that rapprochement with Israel might not be that risky after all.

The Israeli-Japanese rapprochement, however, was not detached from the global political environment, which began to change following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For the Japanese, this was not only an opportunity to warm to the United States but also to begin playing a world-power role. It became obvious to Japanese government officials that by playing the role of mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict Japan could exert a greater influence in the Middle East. Consequently, Israel became the beneficiary. Witnessing the success of Israeli diplomacy in China and India, officials in Tokyo were no longer fearful of Arab reaction and began interacting with Israel freely. The disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza, which followed the failure of the Camp David negotiations between Arafat and Barak, forced the Japanese to denounce Israel. Nevertheless, the Japanese are not likely to reverse the normalization process unless circumstances similar to those which prevented rapprochement in the past reappear.

NOTES

1. Reuven Kashani, *The Jewish Communities in the Far East* (Jerusalem: Sephardic Community Council, 1982), pp. 71–2 [Hebrew].
2. The Japanese government's plan to rescue Jews was approved at Cabinet level and a government representative met with the World Jewish Congress in New York, but the plan was never implemented. The Japanese Consul of Knovo, Senpo Sugihara, issued over 6,000 visas to Jews who attempted to escape from Europe. Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, 'Pepper, Silk and Ivory: The Exotic Jews of the Far East', *Emunah*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), p. 36. A much less altruistic plan was initiated by the Japanese prior to the Second World War. This became known later as the Fugu Plan and its purpose was to establish a Jewish community in Manchuria so that it would serve as a buffer against the Soviet Union. The plan did not materialize; however, nearly 30,000 Jews managed to find a safe haven in Japan.
3. Shimoni to Amir, ISA 2559/4, 11 February 1952.
4. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 4 January 1992.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ha'aretz*, 26 May 1952; *Jerusalem Post*, 26 May 1952.
7. Meron Medzini, 'Japan and the Middle East', *Hamizrach Hachadash*, Vol. 22, No.1 (1972), p. 37 [Hebrew].

8. Rosenfeld to Abe, ISA 2259/4, 27 February 1953.
9. *Al-Akhbar*, 11 September 1953.
10. Ronnel to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 14 October 1953.
11. Israeli Minister in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA FO/2554/14/b, 21 April 1954.
12. Linton to Lewin, ISA 2554/14/b, 28 April 1954.
13. Nissan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2554/14/b, 10 October 1954; *Nippon Times*, 26 December 1954.
14. Linton to Foreign Office, ISA 2554/14/b, 15 June 1955.
15. *Mainichi*, 19 September 1955.
16. *Falastin*, 15 June 1954.
17. Yoran to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 5 September 1954.
18. *Journal du Commerce et de la Marine*, 3 December 1954.
19. *Al-Ahram*, 7 May 1955.
20. The Gaimusho (Japanese Foreign Ministry) to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/4, 19 May 1955.
21. Israel's Legation in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 28 May 1955.
22. Ronnel to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 6 June 1955.
23. Israel's Minister in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 20 July 1955.
24. Nihon Kentetsu had offered to sell at US\$15 per shell and US\$13 per target practice shell when more than 100,000 pieces were ordered. The price of the projectors was set at US\$50 per unit. Israel's Legation in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 30 August 1955.
25. Israeli Legation in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 10 November 1955.
26. Dagan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 11 November 1955.
27. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1955.
28. *Japan News*, 17 February 1956.
29. Linton to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/2, 2 July 1956.
30. The Gaimusho to Israeli Foreign Ministry, ISA 2259/4, 14 February 1956.
31. *Ibid.*, 28 October 1956.
32. Tsipori to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3317/36, 6 January 1961.
33. Lewin to Shimoni, ISA 3317/36, 17 February 1961.
34. *Ma'ariv*, 17 January 1963.
35. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1965.
36. Shneorsohn to Lewin, ISA 3551/26, 28 July 1965.
37. Shneorsohn to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3551/26, 25 February 1965.
38. Shneorsohn to Foreign Ministry, 'A Conversation with Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister Ohada', ISA 3551/26, 3 March 1965.
39. *Japan Times*, 9 November 1967; 5 October 1967; 26 October 1967.
40. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 May 1971.
41. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1972.
42. Richard Ellingworth, 'Japanese Economic Policies and Security', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 90 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1972), p. 16.
43. Fuad (ed.), *International Documents on Palestine* (1973), p. 368; Asai Nobuo, 'Walking a Tightrope in the Middle East', *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (October–November 1991), p. 408.

44. It is often tempting to think that the Japanese communes were a mere imitation of the Israeli communes or kibbutzim. However, a study on this subject had conclusively proven that the Japanese communes developed on their own and that the argument that 'the Japanese have learned from us' which Israelis might be tempted to utter, has no basis in reality. It was only after these communes were established that their members sought contact with their Israeli counterparts. Avi Ron, 'Communes and Communal Life in Japan', *Masa Acher*, No. 15 (June–July 1990), p. 29 [Hebrew].
45. Makoto Momoi, 'The Energy Problem and the Alliance Systems: Japan', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 115 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975), p. 29.
46. William Horsley and Roger Buckley, *Nippon New Superpower: Japan Since 1945* (London: BBC Books, 1990), p. 113.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Shimizu Manabu, 'Japan's Middle East Policy', *Review of International Affairs* (20 January 1990), Vol. 41, p. 18.
51. Fuad (ed.), *International Documents on Palestine* (1973), p. 380.
52. Akifumi Ikeda, 'Japan's Relations with Israel', in Kaoru Sugihara and J.A. Allen (eds), *Japan in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 167.
53. *Ma'ariv*, 14 February 1974.
54. A. Shmuelevitz, *The Persian Gulf and Japan* (Tel Aviv: Shiloa Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1980), p. 28.
55. Nobuo, 'Walking a Tightrope', *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 410.
56. *Jerusalem Post*, 19, 22 February 1984.
57. Bill Emmot, 'The Economic Sources of Japan's Foreign Policy', *Survival*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 50–70.
58. William Nester, *The International Relations of Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 89.
59. Bernard Lewis, 'Rethinking the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Fall 1992), pp. 99–101.
60. *Middle East International*, 14 June 1991.
61. Kurt W. Radtke, 'Japan-Israel Relations in the Eighties', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (May 1988), pp. 528–9.
62. Willy Stern, 'Japan: A Willing Participant in the Arab Boycott of Israel', *Middle East Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Fall 1988), p. 47.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Jerusalem Report*, 20 April 1995.
65. The famous book *The Japanese and the Jews* was published by a Japanese author who called himself 'Isaiah Ben Hasan' in 1970. He argued that although the Japanese are entirely different from the Jews, they should learn from the Jews to be willing to pay dearly for security and resources. Ben Ami Shillony, 'Japan and Israel: The Relationship that Withstood Pressure', *Middle East Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Winter 1985/86), p. 22.
66. Nobuo, 'Walking a Tightrope', *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 411.

67. Clyde Haberman, 'The Presumed Uniqueness of Japan', *New York Times Magazine*, 28 August 1988.
68. In his interview with Menachem Shalev, Japan's Ambassador, Koichi Tsutsumi, said the visit 'does not signify any change in Japan's Middle East policy, but perhaps in Japan's involvement in the area'. *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June 1988.
69. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1988.
70. In 1973 Japan purchased 75 per cent of its daily imports of more than 3 million barrels a day from the Middle East. By 1988, its consumption of Middle East oil plummeted to 60 per cent. *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June 1988.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1988.
73. Nobuo, 'Walking a Tightrope', *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 412.
74. Naramoto Eishuke, 'Japan Aligned with the PLO', *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (January–March 1990), p. 22.
75. Willy May Stern, 'David and Godzilla', *The New Republic*, 27 February 1989, p. 51.
76. Cited *ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
78. David Burrow and Robert T. Kurdle, 'How Middle Powers Can Manage Resource Weakness: Japan and Energy', *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (July 1987), p. 555. Parentheses in original.
79. *Ha'aretz*, 7 February 1990.
80. Burrow and Kurdle, 'How Middle Powers', *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 505.
81. *Ha'aretz*, 25 December 1991.
82. Author's interview with Chaim Choshen, Counselor, Southeast Asia Division, Israel's Foreign Ministry, Jerusalem, 14 June 1995.
83. Caroline Rose, 'Japanese Role in PKO and Humanitarian Assistance', in Inoguchi Takashi and Purnendra Jain (eds), *Japanese Foreign Policy: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 126.
84. *Ha'aretz*, 25 February 1991.
85. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
86. *Ma'ariv*, 2 February 1991.
87. Though somewhat biased, studies published by Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Institute of Jewish Affairs show the extent of Japanese discrimination against Israeli firms. Although there was significant improvement in Japan's attitude toward Israel many Japanese firms still discriminated against their Israeli counterparts and the Japanese government had done little to remedy the situation. See Antony Lerman, *Japanese Compliance with the Arab Boycott of Israel*, Research Report (Jerusalem: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1991), pp. 1–17.
88. *Al-Hamishmar*, 28 January 1992.
89. *Yediot Aharonot*, 28 February 1992.
90. Cited in *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 8 May 1993.
91. *Ibid.*
92. *New York Times*, 9 June 1993.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Tokyo KYODO, Radio in English, FBIS-EAS-93-103, 27 May 1993.

95. Interview given by H.E.Kasrawi (Jordan's Ambassador to Japan) to Jean Pearce, Staff Editor, *Japan 21st* (March 1992), p. 30.

96. *Ashai Shimbun Japan Access*, 20 January 1992.

97. Meron Medzini, 'Reflection on Israel's Asian Policy', *Israel in the Third World*, p. 207.

98. *Al-Hamishmar*, 28 January 1992.

99. *Ashai Evening News*, 18 May 1992.

100. *The Jewish Press*, 8 January 1993.

101. *Jordan Times*, 14 September 1993.

102. *Ibid.*, 28 September 1993.

103. *Tehran Times*, 2 October 1993.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ha'aretz*, 4, 6 May 1994.

106. *Ibid.*, 8, 12, 14 December 1994.

107. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1995.

108. *Hamodia*, 6 June 1995.

109. *Ha'aretz*, 24 October 1995.

110. *Ibid.*, 29 October 1995.

111. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 30 September 1995.

112. *Ibid.*, 23 September 1995.

113. *Near East Report*, Vol. 39, No. 21, 25 September 1995.

114. *Japan Times*, 6 November 1995.

115. *Ma'ariv*, 28 June 1996.

116. David G.Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 253-4.

5

In the Shadow of the Korean Conflict

Israel's policy toward the countries of the Korean Peninsula was subject to the dictates of Cold War diplomacy. South Korea's affinity to the West encouraged its leaders to maintain cordial relations with Israel. At the same time, North Korea's experiment with communism and its hostility toward the West had an adverse effect on its relations with Israel. Since the early days of the Jewish state's existence its leaders were forced to grapple with the fact that North Korea was part of the communist bloc and that any attempt to establish normal relations with Pyongyang was likely to trigger opposition in Washington. Israel's sensitivity to Washington's reaction had already manifested itself during the Korean War when Ben Gurion proposed dispatching troops to join the UN forces in Korea. Although Israel did not participate in the Korean War its sympathy with South Korea was evident. While Israel's relations with South Korea continued to expand into many fields, including the military, North Korea's hostility toward Israel continued unabated. Israel was included in the category of countries that Pyongyang regarded as imperialist.

This chapter attempts to demonstrate that while Seoul was receptive to Israeli overtures, Pyongyang's hostility toward Israel remained so strong that even the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent bankruptcy of communism did not lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. Yet at the same time, Pyongyang proved its sense of pragmatism when it began interacting with Israel in a low-profile manner, in order to benefit from its technical expertise. Although the two countries conducted negotiations, US objections have so far prevented the establishment of diplomatic relations. Moreover, Pyongyang's desire to maintain cordial relations with the Arab states and its arms deals with the radicals among them constituted a serious stumbling block on the road to normalization.

Shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, South Korea appealed for recognition. On 25 May 1949 a spokesman for the South Korean President sent a letter to Sharett, which read in part:

In this note, I have the honor to lay before you the question whether your government would be favorably disposed to accord a full recognition to the Government of the Republic of Korea. I am sure that the newly born democracy in Israel is in full sympathy with another newly born democracy, the Republic of Korea.¹

Israel's response was immediate and favorable. Seeking to avoid confrontation with Pyongyang, Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem welcomed the prospect of cordial relations with Seoul but thought it prudent to maintain a low profile. When asked about the possibility of sending a volunteer force to fight in the Korean War, Sharett replied

that Israel was not planning on doing so.² The decision whether or not to take an active part in the Korean War divided the Israeli Cabinet. Of all Israeli politicians, only Ben Gurion, who realized that Israel would have to rely heavily on US support, was in favor of sending troops to join the coalition against the invading North Korean forces. Sharett, Eban and many others were opposed to active Israeli involvement in the conflict. Following a heated debate on the issue the Cabinet voted with Sharett. Israel explained to the UN Secretary General that its unique position among UN members and the hostility of the surrounding Arab states prevented it from sending troops to Korea.³

In an effort to demonstrate objectivity in the Korean conflict Israel announced its decision to support the United Nations in its efforts to establish peace in the peninsula. Israeli officials condemned aggression from any quarter but refrained from calling North Korea an aggressor or from verbally supporting South Korea.⁴ However, statements made by Israeli officials and by the media made it abundantly clear that Israel sympathized with South Korea. Fortunately, the South Korean government was not as sensitive as the Israelis feared and there was no serious criticism of Israel's statements regarding the Korean conflict. On the contrary, in a letter to President Weizmann the South Korean government expressed its gratitude for Israel's solidarity.⁵ Israel's official position that a peaceful solution to the Korean conflict should be based on the reunification of the country and on a referendum administered in the entire country had no adverse effect on its relations with South Korea.⁶ However, subsequent steps taken by Israel showed that its policy toward the conflict was far from being neutral. After its attempt to portray an image of impartiality, Israel joined the United Nations in denouncing Pyongyang and sent medical supplies to the US-led forces.⁷

In the long run, Israel's decision to refrain from sending forces to Korea had no negative impact on its relations with Seoul—the two countries maintained diplomatic relations when the war ended. Naturally, South Korea's friendly attitude toward Israel led to improved relations between North Korea and the Arab states. Although South Korea managed to establish diplomatic relations with Iraq, South Yemen, North Yemen, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Syria during the 1950s and 1960s, its relationship with them remained cool. This was primarily because South Korea was regarded as a friend of Israel and a US client. During the entire period cooperation between the two countries expanded, with Israel maintaining contacts with South Korea and selling arms to it.⁸ Moreover, the Mossad cooperated with South Korea's intelligence.⁹

Pyongyang's hostility encouraged Israel to respond favorably to Saigon's appeal. When the Israeli Foreign Ministry explored the possible consequences of such a policy the Israeli Ambassador to Seoul said, 'We do not owe anything to North Korea. North Korea has an obvious anti-Israeli stand, open support of Shukairi, encouraging telegrams to Syria, providing assistance to Egypt in the Six Day War and so forth.'¹⁰ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Israel supported South Korea in the United Nations in matters relating to its dispute with North Korea despite the fact that Seoul did not send an ambassador to Israel. In addition, the Israelis felt compelled to vote in line with US interests.

South Korea's contacts with Israel intensified during the early 1960s. Seoul's decision to set up embassies in several Arab countries led the Israelis to request that a South Korean ambassador be nominated to Israel.¹¹ However, the South Korean government

was concerned that its newly established ties with the Arab states would be adversely affected and did not reply favorably to Israel's request. In the spring of 1964, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials met Chief of Intelligence Major General Kang Ki-Chun and Major General Chang Woo Joo from the South Korean defense establishment.¹² US officials reported that the South Koreans were interested in Israel's defense organization, its reserve forces and the semi-military kibbutz concept, which they believed could be useful for their purposes. According to these reports frequent meetings between the Israelis and the South Koreans had taken place.¹³ Moreover, General Charles Bonesteel III had noted that the Israelis expressed an interest in helping South Korea manufacture M-16 rifles.¹⁴

In the autumn of 1964, Seoul asked for Israel's support in the discussion about the Korean question at the General Assembly.¹⁵ Israeli officials tended to be cautious but responded favorably. In addition to its political value as a reliable pro-Western ally and supporter on the Korean question, South Korea regarded Israel as a valuable partner in its reconstruction efforts. South Korea's appreciation of Israel's achievements in agriculture, technical know-how and scientific expertise becomes all the more evident when one examines closely some of the statements made by officials in Seoul. Thus for example, in the annual convention of the ruling party, which took place in January 1965, the Republican Democratic President Park Chung Hee delivered his main speech in which he said, 'Israel, made of a nation which wandered throughout the world for two thousand years, turned in ten years into the richest and most powerful nation in the Middle East.'¹⁶ South Korea became keenly interested in obtaining Israel's assistance in order to form paramilitary youth organizations modeled on the Israeli Gadnah and Nahal, which proved their value in combat as well as settlement building.¹⁷ The Israelis responded favorably to South Korea's requests and the cooperation reached a higher level of intensity.

Although South Korea was interested in close cooperation with Israel there were concerns in Seoul regarding the Arab response. North Korea's success in establishing relations with the radical Arab states and the revolutionary movements in the Middle East caused concern in Seoul. North Korea's diplomatic campaign in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s had a devastating impact on South Korea's interests in the region. As one analyst remarked, 'The Arab tilt toward the North helped both to promote Pyongyang's international legitimacy, and degrade the international status of South Korea.'¹⁸ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the South Korean government felt compelled to court the Arab states. At the same time, however, senior South Korean parliamentarians met Israeli leaders and expressed interest in security links.¹⁹

When asked about the prospect of appointing an ambassador in Israel, a South Korean official said that any formal step in that direction was liable to have an adverse effect on his country's ties with the Arab states and suggested that instead of dealing for formalities the Israelis should concentrate on the practical side of the bilateral relations. In addition, he said that the two countries could expand their cooperation and that South Korea was keenly interested in utilizing Israel's connections with the African states.²⁰

When officials in Seoul witnessed the manner in which North Korea enhanced its reputation as the champion of the downtrodden Palestinians they alerted their government to the need to approach not only conservative countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia but also radical ones like Egypt, Syria, Libya and Algeria, with all of which Pyongyang had

managed to establish solid relations. Moreover, they warned that South Korea's association with the conservative Middle Eastern states exposed it to criticism by radical Arabs, who accused it of collusion with the imperialist, oligarchic and feudal elements in the Middle East against the forces of socialism and progress. Consequently, the South Korean government thought it prudent to avoid antagonizing the Arabs and made occasional remarks favorable to the Palestinian cause. When the South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Dong Won visited Jordan following an Israeli retaliatory action against Palestinian terrorists he expressed support for the Palestinian cause. He told Jordan's Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal that 'Korea supports, as a whole, the allegation maintained by the Arabian side. Korea supports the Arabian countries particularly with regard to the Palestine problem.' Despite the fact that his statement was criticized in the South Korean press, the government remained convinced that closer ties with Israel were liable to have an adverse effect on its ties with the Arab states.²¹ The government's conviction was reinforced by the fact that Pyongyang continued to gain popularity among many organizations and popular movements in the Arab states which regarded North Korea as a progressive country standing in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism and Western domination. Moreover, the anti-imperialist rhetoric which emanated from Pyongyang made it quite difficult for the South Koreans to be open regarding their connections with Israel. Seoul's primary objective was to avoid contacts with countries which assisted North Korea.²² Since Israel's contacts with North Korea were practically nonexistent this qualification had no adverse effect on the bilateral relations. Israel's main objective was to establish formal ties with South Korea. However, realizing that formal relations were not possible at that point, Foreign Ministry officials resorted to a quiet, behind the scenes diplomacy and decided to establish connections through informal contacts and practical work. Thus Israel became involved in training South Korean personnel and in the establishment of model farms in that country.²³

An Israeli embassy operated in Seoul from 1963 until 1978, but according to Foreign Ministry reports budget constraints forced its closure. Speculation regarding the Israeli decision to close its embassy in Seoul abounds. It is possible that Israel had become disappointed with the shift which had taken place in Seoul's policy following the Six Day War and therefore closed the embassy in protest. Indeed, there were strong indications that South Korea was striving to mend fences with the Arab states. In an attempt to improve its image in the Arab world, South Korea supported UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and called for a total withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories.

As it turned out, Israel's decision to close its embassy in Seoul proved to be a serious blunder. Numerous attempts were made to convince South Korea to reopen the embassy; however, officials in Seoul avoided the issue whenever possible and flatly refused to comment on the issue when confronted. According to an official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry this was a direct result of Arab pressure. Unwilling to sever its economic ties with the Arab world South Korea refused to allow Israel a high diplomatic status in Seoul.²⁴ The Israeli Ambassador to Japan became a non-resident ambassador to South Korea and the same arrangement was applied to Israel's commercial attaché.

Initially, South Korea did not reap much benefit from its new foreign policy orientation since the Arabs continued to regard it as a client state of the United States. South Korea's decision to send forces to Vietnam had further tarnished its image in the Arab world. By

the 1970s, South Korea had improved its relations with some of the small Gulf states, which opened missions in Seoul.²⁵ The main catalyst in this move was the oil crisis that followed the Yom Kippur War. South Korea's need for 300,000 barrels a day made it heavily dependent on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Besides, Seoul had earned an estimated US\$36 billion in commodity and construction services and exports to Arab countries. Consequently, its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict underwent a significant change.²⁶ In an effort to improve its relations with the Arab countries, South Korea refused to host the Asian preliminaries for the Fourth World Handball Championship for Women that were scheduled to open in early 1975, because an Israeli team was about to participate in it.²⁷

Nevertheless, relations between the two countries were not seriously disrupted. After his visit to South Korea and Thailand in 1979, Shamir announced that both countries had demonstrated a friendly attitude toward Israel.²⁸ In 1983, an inter-parliamentary meeting was held in Seoul. Among the participants were 11 Israeli Knesset members. The commercial and cultural contacts between the two countries continued in the following years. However, the improper behavior and lack of business ethics on the part of the Israelis stood in the way. A president of a large Korean company went as far as saying that the Israelis have what he called 'grasshopper instincts'. He said, 'They jump from place to place, and where they land, they display their bad manners. The Israelis are their own worst enemies. They think they can do business by following the Israeli pattern; they can't do business this way in the Far East.'²⁹ Similar complaints were made by Japanese and Singaporeans who dealt with Israelis.³⁰ Such perceptions of the Israeli attitude continued to hamper the development of solid commercial relations between the two countries. In some cases, South Korean businessmen and government officials sought to cancel deals made with their Israeli counterparts. After promising to open a trade office in Seoul they denied that they ever had such intentions or that they made any promises. Nevertheless, the volume of trade increased significantly and by the middle of January 1988, Israel's Ministry of Trade and Industry announced that a 33 percent increase in exports was recorded during the first nine months of 1987, reaching US\$14.4 million. At the same time, imports from South Korea increased by 48 percent, reaching a total of US\$38 million. Israeli exports to South Korea included chemicals, metal products (bromide in particular), machines and electrical equipment. Imports to Israel included food products, threads, machinery and industrial equipment. According to Max Livnat, head of the Ministry's Foreign Trade Administration, Israel attached great importance to trade with South Korea due to the country's growing economic importance.³¹

Another obstacle which stood in the way of better trade relations between the two countries was purely economic in nature. There were lingering fears in Jerusalem that Israel could become a dumping ground for cheap Korean products.³² Indeed, Israeli agents were incapable of resisting the purchase of cheap goods. In 1986, imports from South Korea totaled US\$52.4 million and in 1987 they totaled US\$72.9 million, leaving Israel with a trade deficit of US\$37 million and US\$52.5 million respectively.³³ The political benefits seemed meager as well. Despite the growth of trade between the countries the rapprochement with Israel was delayed due to Seoul's unwillingness to antagonize the Arab states. Although Israel's embassy was opened in Seoul by the end of 1992 it was not until 7 January 1993 that South Korea appointed a non-resident

ambassador to Israel.³⁴ The Israelis remained displeased that despite the growing volume of trade both South Korea's government and its private companies still dealt with Israel in a cautious and unofficial manner. Yet despite its reservations about Israeli business ethics the South Korean government attached great value to Israel's technical know-how, but the cautious attitude and the suspicions persisted. As officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry saw it, only a change in the political climate could cement the relations between the two countries. This change had more to do with Middle Eastern politics than with Korean affairs.

The onset of the dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians and the subsequent autonomy deal eased the contact between the two countries and in the autumn of 1993, South Korea officially announced its decision to obtain Israel's world-acclaimed aerospace technology. On 30 September 1993, the Director of the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, Hong Chae-Hak, and the President of Israel Aircraft Industries, Moshe Keret signed a memorandum of cooperation in aerospace technology. They decided that the two research centers would cooperate in developing technologies for high-altitude pilotless aircraft. A South Korean official stated that this cooperation was particularly significant since it reflected Seoul's new policy toward the Jewish state in the wake of Israel's accord with the PLO. At the same time, South Korea's Science and Technology Minister, Kim Si-Chung met with Israel's Education Minister Shulamit Aloni in Tel Aviv. They agreed to expand the cooperation between the two countries in the technological field.³⁵ Trade between the two countries continued to increase and by the end of 1994 representatives of Shinsaga Marketing Network arrived in Israel in order to purchase Israeli products and market them in South Korea. Rami Unger, an Israeli businessman and a representative of a South Korean company in Israel coordinated the deal.³⁶

Although the United States did not prevent Israel from strengthening its ties with South Korea as it did with North Korea, Washington did not refrain from intervening when it seemed that its interests were at stake. In his study of the military establishment in Israel, Dong Yun Huang concluded that the United States would always bring pressure to bear on South Korea to limit its purchases of Israeli military equipment and know-how. He explained that this is due to pressure by American companies who actually control South Korea's sale of military hardware.³⁷ It is too early to determine whether this prediction is accurate. However, so far the commercial ties between the two countries seem to be intensifying.

Recent changes in the political climate in the Middle East, particularly the bleak prospects for peace in the wake of the Intifada al-Aqsa, compelled South Korea to be less overt regarding its connections with Israel but so far there are no signs that Seoul would consider severing its ties with Israel. Both South Korea's connections with the United States and the economic benefits accrued from its trade with Israel are likely to prevent such rupture. Moreover, North Korea's economic woes significantly curtailed its ability to penetrate the Middle East. Gone were the days when Pyongyang could expand its influence in the Arab world just by identifying with the radical regimes in the region. Moreover, Arab countries became more open to Western ideas or to Islamic fundamentalism. Socialism and the state-controlled economy had lost their appeal even in radical countries like Algeria and Syria and therefore there was little that North Korea

could do to attract Arab attention. South Korea, with its Western-oriented market, had become far more appealing to the Arab countries and in recent years Seoul has done a great deal to increase its commercial dealings with the Arab world. Consequently, the decline of North Korea's activity in the Arab world had substantially reduced the competition for the Middle East. Therefore, despite the troubled state of the Arab-Israeli conflict, South Korea is unlikely to sever its relations with Israel. Israel's relations with North Korea presented a far more serious challenge to Israel and this issue is examined in the rest of this chapter.

Israel's relations with North Korea remained tense during the Cold War years. President Kim Il Sung regarded Israel as an instrument used by US imperialism. In one of his speeches explaining the task of journalists in combating US imperialism he said: 'The US imperialists are...increasingly egging the Zionists on to acts of aggression and war against the Arab peoples in the Middle East.'³⁸ The tension between the two countries intensified even further when Israel and South Korea began to cooperate. Nevertheless, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were convinced that even if Pyongyang was not interested in diplomatic relations, Israel should not forgo the opportunity to promote social and cultural ties. In the spring of 1962, Shimoni wrote to Israel's Minister in Warsaw:

We are certainly interested in establishing personal and social relations with both North Korea and North Vietnam if they will demonstrate interest and readiness in such relations... Even if, for reasons over which we have no control, we are in no position to establish formal relations, there is no reason on our part not to maintain social ties.³⁹

As it turned out, however, all Israeli hints regarding such relations fell on deaf ears in Pyongyang. In January 1965, Radio Pyongyang called Israel 'the archenemy of all Arab nations and a tool of imperialist aggression'. Moreover, it strongly denounced South Korea for collaborating with Israel against all Arabs.⁴⁰ *Minjoo Chosun*, organ of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly and the Government of the Democratic Peoples of Korea stated on 23 March 1965:

According to a foreign news dispatch, a South Korean puppet government's 'mission' led by Chang Kyung Soon, Vice-Speaker of the South Korean puppet national assembly, is now in Israel holding talks with top officials of that country... Facts clearly show that the Pak Jung Hi hordes have joined in the anti-Arab scheme of the US, West Germany and Israel... The just struggle of the Arab people against imperialism and the Israeli expansionists is assured certain victory. Pyongyang continued to blame Israel for collaborating with the imperialist powers in an attempt to overthrow the progressive regimes in the Arab world. Radio Pyongyang added that this was done in collaboration with South Korea.⁴¹

Pyongyang's sympathy toward the Arab states was not merely rhetorical. Occasional press reports alluded to the fact that military contracts between North Korea and the Arab states had been signed. According to Pentagon spokesman William Beecher, North

Korean pilots on aircraft borrowed by the Egyptian Air Force during the Yom Kippur War engaged in a brief dogfight with Israeli fighters south of Cairo.⁴² Egypt's Lieutenant General Sa'adeddin Shazli confirmed in his memoirs that North Korean pilots were involved in combat missions for the Egyptian Air Force during that war.⁴³ The Israelis denied that they ever had any encounter with North Korean pilots. Benny Peled, a former Israeli Air Force chief, labeled President Kim Il Sung 'a liar' for claiming that North Korean pilots had fought Israel in 1973. According to Peled, between a squadron and a squadron-and-a-half of North Korean pilots was dispatched to Egypt with their MIG-21s, about a year prior to the outbreak of hostilities, but they avoided combat with the Israeli Air Force and stayed in their base at Bir Arida, north of Aswan.⁴⁴

The rumors about the involvement of North Korean pilots in combat with the Israelis caused considerable tension in the bilateral relations. Moreover, Pyongyang had taken the opportunity to cause friction in Israel's relations with Seoul. Responding to Seoul's accusation that its pilots were involved in Egyptian military operations, North Korea accused South Korea of sending 32 pilots and troops to Israel since 1956. Officials in Seoul denied the accusation saying that like North Korea, they insisted on a just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which entailed a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the restoration of Palestinian rights.⁴⁵ Seoul's response was indicative of its determination to avoid being labeled pro-Israeli so as not to antagonize the Arab states.

By the mid-1970s the Middle East was changing rapidly. Friendship with Middle Eastern countries meant greater economic opportunities for both Korean countries. While South Korea jumped at the opportunity to benefit from friendship with the Arab countries and intensified its diplomatic and commercial efforts in the region, North Korea remained attached to its traditional rhetoric regarding its role as a leader of the downtrodden Middle Eastern people against US imperialism. Pyongyang did not seem to realize that the Middle East was being transformed and therefore failed to make the necessary adjustments. The Middle East in mid-1975 was far more fragmented due to the decline of Pan-Arabism as a unifying force. Events such as the Camp David accords and the Iraq-Iran War had changed the region beyond recognition. The new Middle East was far more practical and materialistic and less inclined to be attracted by obsolete rhetoric and old shibboleths. The practical attitude of South Korea seemed more intelligible to the Arabs than the old-fashioned speeches made by Kim Il-Sung. Even Pyongyang's championship of the cause of the Palestinian people did not earn him enough dividends. The Arab world was divided between 'radical' and 'moderate' states and the Palestinian movement experienced disunity due to the rise of many factions and the disagreement among them regarding the means and methods to obtain the movement's goals. Pyongyang's traditional relationship was mainly with the Fatah section in the Palestinian camp. Officials in Pyongyang did not seem to appreciate the transformation of the PLO into a moderate force within the Palestinian camp. To a large extent, Arafat's efforts to acquire legitimacy turned his alliance with Pyongyang into a serious liability. Not only did Pyongyang let South Korea benefit from the growing economic opportunities in the Middle East, it also failed to appreciate the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict ceased to unite the Arab world, causing fragmentation instead. Pyongyang had also erred in its calculations regarding the Iraq-Iran War. Its decision to back Iran in the conflict had

further undermined its position in the region. Its relations with Iraq deteriorated and all pro-Iraqi Arab states began criticizing it. Even its handling of the Sahara dispute proved to be a disaster. Pyongyang supported the Polisario against Morocco and thereby alienated King Hassan II. The failure of the North Korean regime to appreciate the changes in the region was utilized by South Korea to full advantage.

Throughout the entire period, Pyongyang remained steadfast in its hostility to Israel even when it began to realize the value of Israel's connection with the United States. Even Israel's spectacular success in gaining the recognition of most Asian and African states did not open eyes in Pyongyang. It was Pyongyang's adherence to old axioms and shibboleths that led it to pursue such a disastrous diplomacy. Perhaps the totalitarian nature of the North Korean regime and the reverence accorded to its leader can explain this rigidity.⁴⁶

Pyongyang's hostile attitude toward Israel was not confined to the political sphere. In 1976, it demanded that Israeli football players be excluded from the World Cup Soccer Tournament scheduled to take place in Argentina in 1978.⁴⁷ In 1979, the North Korean mission in Switzerland refused to grant entry visas to a three-man team that expected to compete in the world tennis championships held in Pyongyang in that spring. Consequently, Israel demanded that the games be stripped of their 'official' status.⁴⁸

Despite its willingness to purchase Israeli arms, Pyongyang remained uninterested in formal relations with Israel. The tension between the two countries reached an all-time high in the early 1990s, when North Korea was reported to have sold Scud missiles to Syria. Israeli officials expressed their anger and condemned the sales.⁴⁹ In an attempt to combat criticism of its policy by Israel and the United States the North Korean government stated that it continued to regard Israel as a member of the imperialist camp whose aim was to suppress the Arabs and the Palestinians.⁵⁰ Even the onset of the Arab-Israeli peace talks did not lead to normal relations between the two countries. Yet the Israelis saw benefit in establishing contacts with Pyongyang and the diplomatic efforts did not cease. In November 1992, Eytan Bentsur, Deputy Director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, was sent for talks with the North Korean government. Foreign Ministry officials had consistently denied that the trip was part of an attempt to establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang.⁵¹ Despite Israeli attempts at normalization, Pyongyang's anti-Israeli rhetoric continued as if no progress had been made at all. Israel's scientific and military cooperation with South Korea was harshly condemned in Pyongyang, particularly when the North Korean regime became a target of criticism by the International Atomic Energy Agency whose members had been urging it to respect the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). North Korea's refusal to abide by the NPT led to intense criticism in South Korea. Radio Seoul stated that, 'North Korea turned a deaf ear to the international organization's steady persuasion, thus gaining a new criminal record where it has violated an international treaty.'⁵² In retaliation, North Korea intensified the propaganda campaign against South Korea and blamed its leaders for spreading rumors about the 'development of nuclear weapons in the north'.⁵³ Moreover, South Korea was denounced for its collaboration with Israel. At the same time, Pyongyang continued to champion the cause of the Palestinian people and continued providing arms for various Palestinian groups.⁵⁴ Arafat was reported to have said that he supported North Korea's 'long-standing national salvation policy to reunify Korea on the principle of national

independence.⁵⁵ The collaboration with the Palestinian guerrilla groups was accompanied by harsh anti-Israeli rhetoric which officials in Pyongyang became accustomed to. On one occasion they demanded an immediate halt to what they described as the 'brutal murder of Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip' and a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the restoration of Palestinian rights.⁵⁶ Both Israel and South Korea were accused of planning an air raid in order to eliminate what they called the 'North Korean nuclear threat'. Israel and South Korea continued to be the subject of heavy criticism in the North Korean press.

Commenting on this 'conspiracy', Radio Pyongyang said:

This is a rigmarole that could be uttered only by rabid dogs tamed by the US imperialists who cannot look straight at the realities. Such a reckless act of South Korea and Israel bereft of reason has whipped the entire Korean people into fury. Should South Korea and Israel commit any military aggression on the DPRK at the instigation of the US imperialists, not only the Korean peninsula but the rest of the world would be engulfed in flames of war. The South Korean authorities' bellicose moves clearly show how desperately they are trying to invade the northern half of the country. Israel's argument about the nonexistent 'development of nuclear weapons' by the DPRK is a shameless subterfuge to conceal the truth behind its development of nuclear weapons. Israel, which is already in possession of 300 nuclear weapons, increasing the danger of nuclear war, is the cancer and disturber of peace in the Middle East and the entire world. The South Korean puppets and the Zionists must not act rashly, looking squarely at the reality. If they should touch an inch of land or a blade of grass of the DPRK despite its warnings, the Korean people would mete out a stern punishment to the aggressors.⁵⁷

Pyongyang's verbal assaults on Israel and South Korea continued and even intensified during the spring of 1993. A Pyongyang daily condemned the South Korean-Israeli 'intelligence' cooperation calling it 'Despicable Conspiracy'. Announced over Pyongyang KCNA Radio Broadcast the text read as follows:

The South Korean and Israeli authorities are strengthening bilateral action between their intelligence agencies to cope with the 'nuclear program' of the DPRK, according to foreign press reports. Minju Choson today denounced the despicable conspiracy between the South Korean puppets and Israel as an anti-DPRK move. The news analyst says: It is an unpardonable criminal act for the South Korean puppets to conspire with Israel over our 'nuclear problem', after clinging to the coat-tails of the US and Japanese masters. Still more grave is that the South Korean puppets are working hard to learn from Israel's 'experience' and get its data in bombing Iraq's atomic reactor in 1981. This means that they intend to make a surprise attack on specific targets in the DPRK by Israeli bombing methods. This clearly shows how undisguised their anti-DPRK moves have become. Their despicable conspiracy and anti-DPRK moves are bound to go awry.⁵⁸

At the same time Pyongyang intensified its efforts to re-establish its position in the Middle East. In the spring of 1993, Kim Yong-Sun, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea, visited Syria.⁵⁹ Later that month, a Syrian delegation led by Dr Muhammad Zuhr Mashariqah, Vice President and Vice Chairman of the Syrian National Progressive Front, arrived in Pyongyang to celebrate Kim Il-Sung's birthday. The delegation received a warm welcome by the dignitaries sent to meet them.⁶⁰ Later that month, a ceremony was held in Pyongyang in which friendly city relations were established between Wonsan in Kangwon province and Latakia in Syria. In addition, the city's dignitaries greeted Syria's Ambassador to North Korea, Yasir Farah, and a congratulatory letter to President Assad was read.⁶¹ However, despite the cordial relations between Pyongyang and the Arab states, Israel managed to establish low-profile connections with North Korean officials. Deteriorating economic conditions in North Korea forced the government to seek help from all quarters. North Korea's faltering economy needed support, which Syria was not in a position to provide and therefore officials in Pyongyang began considering the possibility of approaching the Israelis, whom they believed had technical skills and strong connections in Washington.

Thus Pyongyang had taken an unprecedented step, which contradicted its previous rhetoric. In April 1993, Israeli television announced that North Korean elements had approached Israel for the first time with a proposal to establish unofficial ties. North Korean officials who were entrusted by their government to approach Israel were explicitly told that the ties were meant to be predominantly economic in nature. Israel examined the offer with skepticism and care and communicated the message to the United States.⁶² On 12 May 1993, Beilin came to Washington in an effort to soften US opposition to Israel's ties with North Korea. Beilin explained that Israel's fear of Pyongyang's decision to sell missiles to Iran was the main motive for its action.⁶³ While they were sympathetic to Beilin's concern, US officials made it clear that Washington would resent any Israeli contact with Pyongyang. Israeli officials countered by saying that they were puzzled by US demands to terminate all contacts with Pyongyang. In their meeting with US officials at the State Department, the Israelis said that they were concerned about the fact that North Korea had been supplying Iran with 1,300-km missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Nevertheless, US officials remained adamant and insisted that Israel terminate the contacts.⁶⁴ Beilin's repeated arguments that negotiations with Pyongyang were Israel's only hope of ending the sale of arms to Iran fell on deaf ears in Washington. Israel's only hope was that Pyongyang's financial bankruptcy might compel its leaders to consider a cessation of the arms sale to Iran in return for Israeli agricultural aid and technical know-how.⁶⁵ In June 1993, North Korean officials appeared much more conciliatory than before. In their conversation with Beilin they explained that they had decided to sell arms to Iran due to their country's economic plight and that once conditions improved it would not be necessary to continue the sales.⁶⁶ Moreover, they had reached a deal with Israel to terminate the sale of missiles to Iran in return for Israeli financial aid. Initiated by Beilin and some of his aides, the proposed deal involved a commitment by Israel to provide Pyongyang with US\$1 billion from Jewish organizations throughout the United States for special economic projects in North Korea.⁶⁷ These projects included a proposed investment in the mining of known gold deposits in that country. Israeli diplomatic sources reported that China was involved

in convincing North Korea to consent to the deal. A famous American Jewish firm, March Rich, was said to have been linked to this deal.⁶⁸ However, neither Israel nor North Korea was interested in gold—more urgent matters motivated them to start a dialogue. Pyongyang's primary fear was that Israel might cooperate with South Korea in an attempt to destroy North Korea's nuclear reactor. The Israelis, on the other hand, were desperately trying to prevent the sale of North Korean missiles to Iran.⁶⁹ Concerned that news about the deal would jeopardize its ties with the Arab states, Pyongyang issued a statement denying that such a deal was ever concluded and reaffirmed its commitment to support the Arab countries.⁷⁰ In July 1993, Arafat visited Pyongyang where he was received by Kim Il-Sung who referred to him as the 'President of Palestine'.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Pyongyang's attitude toward Israel began to change. As it turned out, however, all Israeli proposals to stop Pyongyang from selling missiles to Iran were firmly rejected by the United States. Asked to comment on Washington's attitude in this matter a State Department official said,

We share Israel's concern regarding the missiles proliferation, and we will act, together with Israel and the international community in order to put an end to the spread of these missiles. However, we believe that meetings between representatives of Israel and North Korea will not be useful.⁷²

The reason given by US officials was that North Korea was continually refusing to sign the NPT.⁷³ Even Israeli leaders were not unanimous regarding this issue. While Peres tended to support the Foreign Ministry's attempt to engage in a meaningful dialogue with North Korea, Rabin categorically rejected the move and wholeheartedly supported the US position. He informed the Cabinet that he was completely displeased with the contacts initiated by the Foreign Ministry.⁷⁴

The contacts with North Korea were not given publicity in the beginning. However, when questioned by reporters regarding the economic deal, Peres revealed that North Korea had taken the initiative in these contacts and asked Israel for financial assistance in managing the gold-mining operation. He told reporters that Israel had expressed an interest in the project and that US pressure made it impossible to carry out the deal. In an interview with a reporter, Beilin explained that Israel was willing to negotiate with North Korea in the hope that better relations would terminate its arms deal with Iran.⁷⁵

When Pyongyang announced its intention to suspend its withdrawal from the NPT, Israel resumed its talks on bilateral relations. However, fear of US reaction continued to be a discouraging factor. In a telephone interview with Shalom Kital, Peres said:

I do not need a visa from the Americans to go to North Korea, but the Americans are in the midst of the negotiations with North Korea, and we should not barge in like a bull in a china shop. After all, we do not presume to replace America in global negotiations, and we do not have the means the United States has to pressure North Korea. Therefore, while we turn an alternative ear to North Korea's proposals, we do not want to turn our back on the fact that the United States is the leader conducting these negotiations.⁷⁶

Israel's request that North Korea stop selling missiles to Iran had fallen on deaf ears in

Pyongyang.⁷⁷ Moreover, officials in Pyongyang denied any connection with Jerusalem. In his meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Velayati on 21 July 1993, North Korea's Ambassador Choi Yong-No said that no negotiations between his country and Israel had taken place.⁷⁸ What complicated matters further was the fact that the news about Israel's contacts with Pyongyang leaked to the South Korean press. Pressure from the South Koreans compelled Peres to promise not to contact Pyongyang without prior consultation with them.⁷⁹ In addition, US pressure on Israel to avoid contact with Pyongyang was too formidable to resist. Consequently, Israel broke off its secret talks with North Korea in August of that year. Israeli officials concluded that the best way to stop North Korea from selling missiles to the Arab states was through cooperation with the United States.⁸⁰ Accordingly, on 17 August 1993, the Israeli government released a statement saying that it 'expects the United States to lead the efforts to halt the supply of missiles from North Korea to our region, and to intensify these efforts'.⁸¹ A report, which appeared in March 1994 in the daily *Ha'aretz*, stating that Israel's contacts with Pyongyang had not come to an end, was flatly denied by Israeli sources.

Although the contacts came to an end Pyongyang continued to show greater moderation in its approach to Israel. This was largely as a result of the Middle East peace process. North Korean officials described the Israeli-PLO accord as a positive development in the Arab-Israeli conflict. A Foreign Ministry's spokesman said that the accord was an important step in the solution of the Palestinian problem and reaffirmed his government's support for the Palestinian people.⁸² In the autumn of 1993, talk about the Israeli-North Korean connection had subsided and Beilin announced that Israel had no intention of establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea. He explained that this decision was made as a result of North Korea's role in supplying missile technology to Iran and the US stand on this issue.⁸³ A Foreign Ministry spokesman explained the Israeli decision saying, 'We began to understand that any attempt to normalize relations with North Korea must be coordinated with the US and currently there are no contacts. There were only probing conversations. The North Koreans showed interest due to our perceived influence in Washington.'⁸⁴

In his meeting with South Korean Foreign Ministry officials Peres said that Israel was no longer dealing with North Korea and that its previous contacts with officials there were only meant to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.⁸⁵ By the end of 1993, reports were circulating that an export version of the North Korean intermediate-range ballistic missile, the Rondong, may have been delivered to Iran. Israel was estimated to be within the range of the new weapon.⁸⁶ The news provoked heavy criticism from the Israeli government. In an interview with South Korean television, Rabin said, 'We look at North Korea as a great danger not only to your country but also to the Middle East.'⁸⁷ The news regarding the sale originated in a report by the CIA, stating that the North Korean nuclear weapons program and the sale of missiles to Iran and other Middle Eastern countries constituted a danger to Israel.⁸⁸ Israel's Ambassador to South Korea, Asher Naim, told Israel Radio that North Korea sold Scud missiles, some with a range of 1,000 km, to countries hostile to Israel. He said that Israel tried unsuccessfully to set up contacts in order to persuade Pyongyang to stop the sales but added grimly, 'we realized we were too small a player in this world poker game'.⁸⁹ Rabin claimed that North Korea sent Scud-C missiles to Syria and added that it was likely that the deal included Iran as well.⁹⁰

Israel's success in convincing China to refrain from selling ballistic missiles to the Middle East encouraged it to extract a similar promise from North Korea. Press reports suggested, however, that Pyongyang insisted on large cash payments from Israel in order to stop the sales. The meetings between Israeli and North Korean officials centered on the possibility that the economic contacts between the two countries would expand. There were also reports that North Korea extended an invitation to Peres to visit Pyongyang. However, both sides denied that such a proposal was ever made.⁹¹

During his visit to Seoul in December 1994, Rabin met South Korea's President. Both agreed that North Korea's policy of supplying Iran with missile technology constituted a threat to the region; they also agreed to expand the cooperation between the two countries to many areas.⁹² In January 1996, the Israeli Defense Ministry announced South Korea's decision to buy US\$32.5 million-worth of Israeli-made drone aircraft. It stated that the purchase of the remotely piloted vehicles would begin in 1997 and extend over three years.⁹³ North Korean sources were highly critical of this sale and Radio Pyongyang denounced both countries.

North Korea's arms sales to Arab states continued to raise concern in Israel. In the summer of 1996, the CIA discovered that Pyongyang was supplying new mobile Scud missile launchers to Egypt. The Israeli defense establishment expressed its deep concern to CIA Director John Deutch.⁹⁴ Israel's attempts to reach North Korea came to a standstill following the warning made by US officials. Yet it seems that Israel's attempts to reach Pyongyang paid some dividends. Despite the lack of any dialogue between the two countries it became increasingly evident that North Korea softened its attitude toward Israel. A careful perusal of the North Korean press shows that it contains significantly less anti-Israeli propaganda. The familiar rhetoric depicting Israel as a tool of imperialist Western powers had tapered off considerably. Following the contacts between the two countries, Pyongyang couched its criticism of Israel in a much gentler manner. Thus for example, expressing his disapproval of the Middle East peace process a spokesman for the North Korean Foreign Ministry stated in an interview to the press:

We express deep concern on the challenge of Israel, which has laid a new obstacle in the Mid-East peace process the prospect of which had been in sight. Israel should stop such unjustifiable acts as delaying and endangering the Middle East peace process and pay attention to the just demands of the Arabs. We consider that the Mid-East issue should be solved in a fair and comprehensible way on the basis of 'land-for-peace principle', and hold that the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people including the right to the establishment of an independent state should be restored and Israel should withdraw from all Arab land under occupation.⁹⁵

Though critical of Israeli policy, this statement lacks the fiery denunciation characteristic of yesteryear. It is difficult to understand the motives of Kim Jong-Il and his comrades. However, the state of near bankruptcy and hunger in which the North Korean regime found itself would probably force it to open its doors to Western countries. A glance at Pyongyang's diplomatic map shows greater openness to countries that maintain close relations with the United States. During the years 2000 and 2001 Pyongyang established

or restored diplomatic relations with countries such as the Philippines, Kuwait, Bahrain, Australia, New Zealand and some European countries. If this trend continues, Israel with its unusual technical skills and its connections with the United States might be the beneficiary.

This chapter explored Israel's attempts to establish diplomatic relations with both countries of the Korean Peninsula. Establishing diplomatic relations with both countries proved to be the most serious challenge for Israeli diplomacy. A major factor affecting Israel's efforts in the peninsula was North Korea's outcast position. Israel's attempt to maintain cordial relations with Seoul were successful due to encouragement from Washington. At the same time, Israel's attempts to establish ties with Pyongyang met with strong American disapproval. Since Pyongyang had a claim to become the champion of all downtrodden peoples and revolutionary movements throughout the world, it found it necessary to castigate Israel as an ally of the imperialist powers. Nevertheless, the changing political world climate which followed the breakup of the Soviet Union was so profound that it increased North Korea's isolation and adversely affected its economy. Under these conditions North Korean leaders began to adopt a pragmatic approach. Officials in Pyongyang seem to have made a clear separation between the official rhetoric of their government, which continued to castigate Israel as a member of the imperialist camp and their appreciation of Israel as an advanced country capable of providing them with badly needed technical assistance for their isolated country. Yet this very sense of keen pragmatism continues to prevent them from significantly improving relations with Israel. So far it seems that in order to normalize relations with Israel the North Korean government needs not only to mend fences with the United States but also to see a significant progress in the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

Given the hostility between Pyongyang and Seoul and the rapprochement between Jerusalem and Seoul it is difficult to imagine a rapid improvement in Israel's relations with North Korea. It is likely that the relations will gradually improve due to Pyongyang's fear that South Korea can only benefit from Israel's experience in dealing with nuclear reactors.⁹⁶ However, in the foreseeable future, the contacts are likely to remain confined to commerce. In light of the unrest in the West Bank and Gaza and the failure of the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach a settlement, North Korea is not likely to give publicity to any contacts it might have with Israel. Nor is it likely to grant Israel official recognition in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. Ambassador Chough Pyung Ok, Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Korea and Chief Delegate to the UN. ISA, 2561/8, 25 May 1949.
2. *Jerusalem Post*, 17 July 1950.
3. *Ibid.*, 17 October 1988.
4. Shimoni to Pollack, ISA 2561/8, 16 July 1950.
5. Chang to Weizmann, ISA 2561/8, 15 July 1950.
6. Keren to Eban, ISA 2561/8, 28 September 1950.
7. *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 February 1954.

8. See Aaron S.Klieman, *Israeli Arms Sales: Perspectives and Prospects* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1984).
9. Elitzur to Embassy in Seoul, ISA 4070/26, 19 March 1967.
10. Arbelle to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4070/26, 25 October 1967.
11. Elitzur to Embassy in Seoul, ISA 3599/14, 3 December 1965.
12. Kedar to Shimoni, ISA 3599/14, 16 May 1964.
13. Telegram from the Commander of the United States Forces, Korea (Bonesteel) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp), Seoul, 29 February 1968, 1028 *Z.FRUS, 1964–1968*, Vol. 29, Part I: Korea. Karen L.Gatz and David S.Patterson (eds) (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2000), Document No. 183, p. 396.
14. 'Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 20 November 1968', *ibid.*, Document No. 209, p. 453.
15. Korean Mission in Japan: Note Verbale, ISA 3599/14, 29 September 1964.
16. Kedar to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3599/14, 11 January 1965.
17. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3599/14, 16 February 1965.
18. Chung-in-Moon, 'Between Ideology and Interest: North Korea in the Middle East', in Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Kho and Tae-Hwan Kwak (eds), *The Foreign Relations of North Korea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 380.
19. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 September 1966.
20. Ne'eman to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4070/26, 1 November 1966.
21. Arbelle to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4070/26, 10, 12, 19 December 1966.
22. On 24 January 1967, South Korea's Prime Minister declared that his country would not seek diplomatic ties with any country, even if it was neutral, if it helped or was useful to North Korea. Arbelle to Ambassador in Tokyo. ISA 4070/26, 25 January 1967.
23. *Korea Times*, 14 February 1967.
24. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
25. Youngnok Koo and Sung-Joo Han (eds), *The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 238–40.
26. *Jerusalem Post*, 17 December 1994.
27. *Ibid.*, 2 February 1975.
28. *Ibid.*, 11 January 1979.
29. *Ibid.*, 10 January 1986.
30. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
31. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 16 January 1988.
32. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
33. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 January 1988.
34. *Arab News*, 9 January 1993.
35. Seoul YONHAP Radio in English, FBIS-NES-93-191, 5 October 1993.
36. *Ha'aratz*, 21 December 1994.
37. *Ibid.*, 30 October 1995.
38. 'Progressive Journalists of the Five Continents, Wield Your Powerful Revolutionary Pen and Sternly Condemn US Imperialism'. Speech of Greeting at the International Conference on the Tasks of Journalists of the Whole World in

- Their Fight Against the Aggression of US Imperialism. Kim Il-Sung, *Selected Works*, Vol. 4 (Pyongyang: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1972), p. 322.
39. Shimoni to Israeli Minister in Warsaw, ISA 3404/27, 14 May 1962.
 40. Kedar to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3599/14, 8 February 1965.
 41. Excerpt from North Korean English Language Broadcast of 10 June 1965. ISA 3599/14, 2 July 1965.
 42. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 October 1973.
 43. According to his account, 20 North Korean combat pilots, eight navigators, three commanders, one physician and a cook served in the Egyptian Air Force at that time. The pilots flew MIG-21 fighters and were engaged in dogfights with Israeli warplanes. *Jerusalem Post*, 1 January 1979.
 44. *Ibid.*, 6 April 1983.
 45. *Ibid.*, 28 January 1975.
 46. For an analysis of DPRK's failure to adjust to the new realities in the Middle East see Chung-in-Moon, 'Between Ideology and Interest', in *Foreign Relations*, Jae Kyn Park, Buyung Chul Kho and Jae-Hwan (eds), pp. 392–7.
 47. *Jerusalem Post*, 21 September 1976.
 48. *Ibid.*, 23 April 1979.
 49. *Davar*, 9 February 1993.
 50. *Pyongyang Times*, 2 November 1991.
 51. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 14 November 1992.
 52. Seoul KBS-1, Radio in Korean, FBIS-EAS-93-061, 1 April 1993.
 53. *The People's Korea*, 27 June 1992.
 54. Despite its open championing of the Palestinian cause, Pyongyang tended to conceal its military relations with the Palestinians. Following Operation Peace for Galilee of June 1982, in Lebanon, the IDF uncovered North Korean arms shipments packaged in crates marked AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT. Samuel Katz, *Israel Versus Jibril: The Thirty-Year War Against a Master Terrorist* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. 79.
 55. *The People's Korea*, 30 January 1993.
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 57. Pyongyang KCNA, Radio in English, FBIS-EAS-93-082, 30 April 1993.
 58. *The People's Korea*, 22 May 1993.
 59. Pyongyang Korean Central Broadcasting Network in Korean. FBIS-EAS-93-066, 8 April 1993.
 60. Pyongyang KCNA, Radio in English, FBIS-EAS-93-071, 15 April 1993.
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 62. Jerusalem Israel Television Network in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-93-082, 30 April 1993.
 63. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-93-091, 13 May 1993.
 64. *Ibid.*, FBIS-NES-93-097, 21 May 1993.
 65. *Ibid.*, FBIS-NES-93-115, 17 June 1993.
 66. *Ibid.*
 67. *Ha'aretz*, 15 June 1993.
 68. *Middle East International*, 6 August 1993.

69. *Jerusalem Post*, 18 June 1993.
70. *The People's Korea*, 19 June 1993.
71. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1993.
72. Cited in *Hatzofe*, 17 August 1993.
73. *Ibid.*, 16 August 1993.
74. *Hadashot*, 15 August 1993.
75. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-93-156, 16 August 1993.
76. *Ibid.*, FBIS-NES-93-112, 14 June 1993.
77. When asked by Israel to suspend its sale of missiles to Iran the North Korean government asked that in return for its compliance Israel invest in North Korea the same amount of money that the latter was to receive from Iran. *Hatzofe*, 27 June 1993.
78. Tehran IRNA in English, FBIS-NES-93-139, 22 July 1993; Jerusalem Qol Yisrael in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-93-156, 16 August 1993.
79. *Hatzofe*, 23 June 1993.
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81. *Near East Report*, Vol. 37, No. 34, 23 August 1993.
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87. *Middle East International*, 13 May 1994.
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89. *Kuwait Times*, 19 June 1994.
90. *Near East Report*, Vol. 37, No. 34, 23 August 1993.
91. *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 23, No. 7, September 1993, p. 24.
92. *Ha'aretz*, 16, 18 December 1994.
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Part III
South-East Asia

6

Burma—From Honeymoon to Balanced Relationship

By the mid-1950s Israel was seen as a poor and distant country incapable of offering much to any country on the Asian continent. Yet its expertise in arms production and agricultural technology was an asset, particularly for small countries like Burma, which obtained their independence from colonial rule in the aftermath of the Second World War. Besides, Israel was a small country which demanded little from countries that could benefit most from its assistance. Israel's main concern was to obtain legitimacy, recognition and support in the United Nations. Friendship with Israel did not require a definite commitment to a certain ideology and the risk of alienating the Arab states was minimal as long as these countries did not give much publicity to the connections. Dayan, who served as Chief of Staff in Ben Gurion's government when the 'honeymoon' between Israel and Burma began, explained why countries like Burma were attracted to Israel. He writes:

We have unique advantage in two areas; first of all, unlike other countries, we are not suspected of imperialism. Second, we are more skilled than others in developing agriculture in arid areas that are so similar to those in our country. How to build a new settlement on a cooperative basis—is our expertise.¹

These were the main reasons for the willingness of the small Asian countries to be associated with Israel. However, the fear of alienating the Arab states constituted a deterrent which they could hardly afford to ignore. Therefore, they sought to take advantage of Israeli expertise in a low-profile manner. They supported pro-Arab resolutions in the United Nations, or abstained when doing so was not detrimental to their relations with the Arabs. However, privately they told the Israelis not to take these votes too seriously and thereby continued to benefit from Israel's technical expertise.²

This chapter argues that although Israel's relationship with Burma was exceptionally warm during the 1950s and early 1960s, it was marred by serious flaws which plagued Israel's policy toward all Asian countries. Anxious to gain a foothold in the vast continent of Asia, close to the most populated countries whose importance in world affairs was so obvious, the Israelis responded to Burma's technical needs with unusual alacrity and enthusiasm. As it turned out, however, they could not live up to their obligations to provide the necessary aid. Neither the equipment nor the personnel sent to Burma were the best that Israel could offer. Consequently, the Burmese were disappointed and turned their back on Israel. This episode in Israel's relations with the Asian states ended ingloriously. Some critics argued that by not being fully committed to this enterprise Israel had missed a unique opportunity to show what it could do to assist

the developing countries of the Asian continent and thereby delayed the normalization process with more important countries like India and China. Others believed that Burma, like most Afro-Asian states, would inevitably turn its back on Israel and questioned whether such investment would reap benefits at all. Yet there was considerable value in this relationship in that Burma served as a workshop for Israel's foreign policy in Asia. Unfortunately, the special relationship ended when General Ne Win deposed U Nu in 1960. Formally, the two countries still maintained diplomatic relations; however, Israel's hopes that the warmth that characterized the bilateral relations during U Nu's incumbency would resume have yet to become reality.

Burma's rapprochement with Israel during the early years was hardly in line with its foreign policy orientation considering the fact that it was a neutralist country par excellence. Burma did not join the British Commonwealth and did not bind itself in treaties or defense alliances. This was largely due to its insecurity, which stemmed from its geographical location close to the world's most populated countries. Burma's vulnerability became abundantly clear when Chinese nationalist troops, who were chased out by Chinese communists in 1949–50, fled to its territory. Moreover, Burma was plagued by domestic insurrections and ethnic unrest and there was a need to reconcile leftist and moderate political forces in the country. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Burmese government resorted to neutralism; so determined was it to maintain neutrality that it chose to forgo US aid when it discovered that the CIA supported the incursion of the Chinese nationalist forces. Moreover, the Burmese government preferred to pay for Soviet assistance with rice rather than be in the Soviet Union's debt.³ The 'honeymoon' was in large measure a result of U Nu's conviction that Israel was the quintessential example of the egalitarian social and economic order that he wished to establish in his country. He identified with Israel so closely that he made efforts to promote its participation in nonaligned meetings, first with Nehru's support and later through his own efforts.

On 7 December 1949 Burma recognized Israel despite its earlier objection to its admission to the United Nations, in May 1949. On 13 July 1952, the Burmese government decided to exchange missions and agreed to the appointment of an Israeli minister to Burma. A top-level Burmese delegation headed by the socialist leader U Kyaw Nyein visited Israel in December 1952 and its members were highly impressed by what they saw.⁴ The Burmese government contacted the Israelis and asked for cooperation in developing Burma's agriculture and infrastructure. The Israelis responded with alacrity. Israeli engineers, architects and other specialists were sent to Burma to embark on ambitious developmental projects. Thus began the 'honeymoon' that lasted until 1962. In January 1953, Burma decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Sharett agreed and Hacoheh was sent to Rangoon as minister.⁵ Burmese agents contacted Israel and asked for an invitation to send a Burmese team in order to learn Israeli methods of army recruitment and to obtain information on the way to provide security to border settlements.⁶ On 21 December 1953 the first Israeli Ambassador arrived in Burma and presented his credentials.⁷ When the Asian Socialist Conference met in Rangoon that year, the relations between the two countries seemed more than satisfactory. In his speech at the conference, Sharett gave his blessing to the nomination of U Ba Swe for the chairmanship saying,

I believe, comrades, that all of us know that this has not been merely a trip to a conference, but also a voyage to Burma, a country which has a special place in the hearts of all of us, a country which has gone through a heroic struggle, a country in the independence of which we all rejoice.⁸

Israel had taken the opportunity to lend Burma diplomatic support whenever the need arose as long as such support did not conflict with its interests in the region and did not harm US interests. Thus for example, when Chinese nationalist forces invaded Shan State the Israelis supported the Burmese cause. Such a move was unlikely to have any adverse effect on Israel's interests in Asia since there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and China at that time. Moreover, there was no danger of alienating Washington by supporting the Burmese claim. The Burmese were said to have been highly impressed with Israel's experiment with democratic socialism and saw no real danger in asking for its technical assistance. On 20 January 1954, a Burmese delegation arrived in Israel where its members visited civil and military industries.⁹ Impressed by what it learned about the National Service in Israel, the Burmese government dispatched another team. Headed by Commodore Than Pe, the delegates arrived in Israel on 19 June 1954.¹⁰ The Burmese requested that they be allowed to send pilots for training in Israel and to establish a munitions factory with Israeli guidance.¹¹ Speaking on the occasion of Burma's Seventh Anniversary, Hacoheh said, 'I am particularly gratified to see the fruition of cordial relations between the Armed Forces of both countries, animated as both are by the identical desire to be a faithful instrument, wielded in the interest of the people's welfare, and a valiant shield of the country's independence and sovereignty.'¹² There were also rumors that the Mossad was involved in training Burmese agents in intelligence methods but there was no evidence to that effect.¹³ In the Bogor Conference held in December 1954, in preparation for the Bandung Conference, U Nu threatened not to attend unless Israel was invited.¹⁴ However, fearing that the Arab states would boycott the conference he withdrew his proposal. The Burmese press joined many organizations and individuals in pressuring the government to speak in favor of Israeli participation.¹⁵ At the Bandung Conference, U Nu foiled the Arab states' attempt to gain the support of the delegates in their conflict with Israel, and when Cairo protested against his plan to visit both Egypt and Israel, he chose to cancel his trip to Egypt.¹⁶

Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were astonished and impressed by the courage of the Burmese leader who stood up to prominent Arab leaders such as Nasser. U Nu's sympathetic attitude toward Israel stood in sharp contrast to other leaders of the Afro-Asian world who exploited every opportunity to denounce Israel as an agent of the imperialist powers. When U Nu arrived in Israel in May 1955, the two countries issued a joint communiqué declaring that they were dedicated to the ideas enshrined in the UN Charter and that both would cooperate in order to promote peace and social justice.¹⁷ U Nu was the first Asian leader who came to Israel and his friendship with Ben Gurion raised hopes in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the cooperation between the two countries would set a precedent which all other Asian states would follow. Though he was pragmatic and his main concern was his country's welfare, U Nu was moved by a sense of admiration for Ben Gurion whom he compared to Yugoslavia's leader Josip Tito, saying that both leaders were 'filled with determination and honesty of purpose' and

that 'it was impossible for anyone who had close personal relations with them not to be disposed in their favour'.¹⁸ While in Israel he had the opportunity to visit several kibbutzim on the borders with Syria and Egypt. The Israelis offered to build a similar system of self-defending communities in Shan State west of the Salween River, close to Burma's border with China. So impressed was U Nu with Israel's willingness to extend aid to his country that he did not succumb to Arab pressure to refrain from opening a dialogue with Israel.¹⁹

Commenting on U Nu's firm stand, the British Ambassador to Israel said, 'The Burmese Prime Minister's refusal to be railroaded by Arab pressure into an anti-Israeli policy has further strengthened the admiration of the country for U Nu as Israel's lone champion in the Asian world.'²⁰ The two countries signed a trade agreement according to which Israel was to receive Burmese rice in return for Israeli manufactured goods. This was followed by another agreement in which both sides agreed to economic cooperation which provided for the building of a rubber tire factory, a ceramic and glassware factory, a paint and varnish plant, and a US\$30 million investment in agricultural development in Shan State.²¹

In the summer of 1956, Sharett received a personal letter of invitation from U Ba Swe to visit Burma.²² He arrived in Rangoon on 21 September 1956. In that meeting U Nu said that his government was absolutely eager to cooperate with Israel but that some government officials were afraid that Israel and its people were 'too smart'.²³ U Nu had an insatiable desire to learn from Israel—after the meeting, Sharett recorded in his memoirs, 'The man is ready to devour in his eyes and his mind whatever is shown to him, and his appetite to obtain experts is insatiable.'²⁴ Unlike other Asian leaders, U Nu did not seem to be affected by the anti-Zionist sentiment that prevailed in the Third World and discouraged association with Israel. He did not suspect Israel's intentions and did not see it as a threat to peace in the Middle East. In fact, he was pleased to hear that the French fulfilled their obligation to send arms to Israel.²⁵

Eliashiv Ben-Horin, who served as Israel's Ambassador in Rangoon from 1960 to 1963 remarked:

To U Nu's mind, there was almost nothing Israel could not do, and our clean intentions were above suspicion, rightly so. In my days as ambassador, it had become almost impossible to turn down a request for professional help. Protestations of inexperience in this field or that met with utter disbelief.²⁶

U Nu's attitude toward Israel and his courage to stand against all his critics can be attributed to his strong belief in socialism. In a speech to the Constituent Assembly on 24 September 1947 he called Burma a 'leftist' country. He said that, 'A leftist country is one in which the people working together to the best of their power and ability strive to convert the natural resources and produce of the land...into consumer commodities to which everybody will be entitled each according to his need.'²⁷ U Nu was inspired by ideas of utopian socialism. Though he was pragmatic and keenly aware of Burma's national interests he did not abandon his belief in the possibility of establishing an egalitarian society. In many of his speeches he made references to socialist literature such as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Thomas Campanella's *The City of the Sun* and works by

James Harrington, Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, Considerant as well as Hegel, Marx and Engels.²⁸ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that he was so impressed with the Israeli experiment in establishing egalitarian communities. Apart from his belief in social equality, U Nu was motivated by a vision of world order in which all countries could live in harmony. As Muang Muang said, 'U Nu sought the role of bringer of world peace. He went out to Peking, Washington, Jerusalem, Cairo, Belgrade, and everywhere, to try and change hearts and promote a world brotherhood of man.'²⁹ But there was also a practical dimension in U Nu's thought. In a speech on the occasion of Burma's Seventh Anniversary he made it clear that he would seek aid from any country willing to provide it. He said,

In foreign relations we refuse to align ourselves with any power bloc and at the same time we are friendly with both. Therefore, we are prepared to accept aid from any quarter provided such aid is mutually advantageous to both and without strings attached. There will be no instance of our refusal of aid because it is from this country or that country.³⁰

Moreover, he believed that Burma could play a constructive role in world affairs. In one of his speeches on foreign affairs he said,

Now we could play our role in world affairs to the fullest extent of our ability. We are like a proverbial prawn which, despite its tiny proportions, could yet swim in the ocean. But we abhor the very idea of acting as a disciple to any Big Power or as a satellite of any political bloc. We do not like to lift our fingers or nod our heads at a signal from anyone.³¹

U Nu was convinced that close association with Israel would minimize Burma's dependence on the great powers. Moreover, he believed that Israel's acceptance and recognition in Asia was just a matter of time. However, his admiration of the Israeli socialist experiment led him to minimize the severity of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the magnitude of the Palestinian dilemma. He rarely expressed sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people, doing so only during his meetings with Arab leaders.

Initially, Arab reaction to U Nu's expressions of friendship with Israel was immediate but counterproductive.³² When confronted by the Arab states on the Palestine issue, Foreign Minister U Thi Han responded by saying that Burma's definition of nonalignment supported 'the right of every nation to think and act on any issue according to its own convictions and according to its own judgment'.³³ What made the 'honeymoon' possible was the lack of strong domestic opposition to the government's foreign policy. The Burmese Muslim community was involved in disputes with the Indian Muslim community and it lacked the means and the desire to change the government's foreign policy.³⁴ Moreover, Burmese Muslims were aware of their minority status. They tended to maintain a low profile and did not interfere in political affairs.³⁵ Therefore, Israel's relations with Burma were relatively free from pressure by the Muslim world. Nevertheless, U Nu did not lose sight of his country's political interests and felt compelled to condemn Israel's collusion with Great Britain and France during the Suez Affair. Explaining his country's position on that matter U Nu said,

Despite our friendship for Israel, we were compelled to join in the condemnation of this invasion as an act of aggression. We recognize that Israel could plead extenuating factors for the attack. The Arabs make no secret of their hostility toward her, and the large scale shipments of arms to Egypt during 1956 must have been a source of considerable concern to Israel. But we cannot subscribe to the doctrine of 'preventive war'. We do not think it can ever be morally justified. Besides, today the world lives on the edge of a volcano. Any disturbance may cause that volcano to erupt. In our view, no nation has the right to take such a risk. We were therefore gratified when Israel bowed to the authority of the United Nations and withdrew from Egyptian soil.³⁶

Yet despite his pro-Egyptian stand during the conflict U Nu did not support Egypt's practice of blocking the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping. Although Ne Win visited Egypt and tried to appear as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict his call for negotiations fell on deaf ears in Cairo.

In August 1957, the Burmese Defense Services and the Israeli construction company Solel Boneh decided on building projects in Burma. Israel agreed to supply the skilled manpower and the equipment. Dayan's visit to Burma in January 1958 was followed by Ne Win's visit to Israel in June 1959. It was ironic that Ne Win, who later distanced his country from Israel, was so highly impressed with its achievements. He said before his departure from Israel, 'Impressions which I gained during my visit are deep and will surely be lasting, and I shall be able in the future to appreciate more fully all questions relating to our two countries...it is my firm belief that the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our two countries will grow from strength to strength.'³⁷

When the conference of the nonaligned nations met in Belgrade in 1961, U Nu found it impossible to support a resolution condemning Israel. He stated that since his country was friendly to Israel he could not accept the offensive paragraph in the resolution.³⁸ When Ben Gurion visited Burma in December 1961, he agreed to help the Burmese in land reclamation and the two sides pledged to continue the cooperation. In February 1962, Golda Meir came to Burma and was cordially received by its government. However, there were disquieting signs that all was not well in the bilateral relations. As it turned out, Israel's expectations from Burma were too high. Israel's hope that its commercial and cultural contacts would ease its acceptance in Asia was dealt a major blow at the Bandung Conference. Despite U Nu's pressure, the nonaligned nations opposed Israel's participation.³⁹ Hacoheh continued to involve Israel in numerous projects in Burma, but as it turned out, Israel could not live up to its commitments and therefore sought to limit its involvement there.

Much could have been done to prevent this state of affairs had Ben Gurion paid attention to the generous offers which Israeli officials made to their Burmese counterparts. He was undoubtedly aware of Israel's inability to live up to its promises to Burma from the outset. In January 1958, Dayan had already informed him about Israel's poor performance in Burma after returning from his trip. According to his account, three main reasons led to Burmese disappointment. First, the Israeli embassy was inadequate for the task. Hacoheh had good connections in Burma—he managed to establish good foundations; however, he was not sufficiently practical. Second, Hacoheh was followed

by less competent ambassadors who failed to maintain close cooperation with the Burmese, who consequently complained that the embassy's personnel were rigid and indifferent toward them. The Israeli Ambassador was no more than a public relations man attending one cocktail party after the other. Third, the Israeli experts sent to Burma were by no means the best that Israel could offer, and what made matters worse was the fact that these specialists were in a position to determine their working conditions. They constantly bargained with their superiors regarding salaries and fringe benefits, and in consequence were involved in perpetual disagreements and strife. The most frustrating aspect of this issue from Burmese point of view was the fact that Israeli officials had promised far more than they were able to deliver. Agricultural experts had told the Burmese that they could help them grow 1 million acres of wheat, an assessment that turned out to be too rosy and unrealistic.

The Burmese were disappointed not only by the Israeli plans, which could never materialize, but also by the attitude of all those who were supposed to represent the State of Israel. One of the Israeli representatives was declared *persona non grata* and another defected to Canada. Moreover, with the exception of Dr Aaron Bergman who learned how to read and write Burmese, the embassy personnel showed no interest in Burmese culture. The Burmese continued to maintain cordial relations with Israel but could not conceal their disappointment as Dayan recalled in his memoirs:

I had a heavy feeling from the magnificent reception which they gave us. It was like a kiss of death, a tap on the shoulder as if they were saying, 'you are a good fellow, but we have no use for you'. Sometimes their hospitality was so exaggerated as if they were trying to tell us, we are going to show you how decent countries act in such matters.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, there were some important accomplishments that made it worthwhile for the Burmese to continue the Israeli connection. The planning of the Namsang Resettlement Project was carried out with the advice of Israeli experts. Two Burmese groups were sent to Israel for a training period of 14 months.⁴¹ Though not as warm as they had been in the early years the bilateral relations remained cordial and when Ben Gurion returned from his trip to Burma in December 1961, he boasted that 'The heads of state and the army in Burma, and primarily Prime Minister U Nu have more loyalty and sympathy to Israel than any other state in the world.'⁴²

U Nu's decision to visit Israel after canceling his visit to Egypt was an encouraging sign for the Israelis. The Burmese were willing to increase their cooperation with Israel; however Arab pressure was so formidable that U Nu was compelled to exercise caution. After being criticized by Hacoheh for his initial decision to cancel his trip to Israel, U Nu said, 'You said some hard things to me. You must remember that I am obliged to weigh relations between states as I would personal relations. However, although I came under heavy pressure at Bandung, I was wrong to cancel my visit to your country.'⁴³

Seeking to avoid pressure from both Arabs and Israelis, U Nu sought justification and legitimacy for his diplomacy by promoting UN resolutions. He wrote in his memoirs:

We must do our utmost to preserve peace in the entire world and to maintain normal relations and understanding among all nations. We believe that the

United Nations is doing its utmost to achieve these aims and therefore, we ought to give them full support and cooperation... If any nation, whether friendly or hostile, ignored the peace plans worked out by the United Nations, it would be our duty to rise against it with bravery.⁴⁴

It became increasingly difficult for U Nu to justify his friendly relations with Israel in the post-Bandung era when the ideology of nonalignment swept the Asian continent. Criticism against U Nu was heard not only in nonaligned meetings, which were in vogue at that time, but also in the Arab press. Moreover, negative remarks were made in newspaper editorials throughout Asia. Burma was criticized for its cordial relations with the Zionist state, which allowed itself to be used as a tool of exploitation by the imperialist powers against the downtrodden people of the Third World. Such criticism was particularly harsh in the Soviet Union, whose official organs castigated U Nu for his friendship with what they described as a 'Zionist and imperialist state'. In addition, Nasser's anti-Israeli rhetoric could not be easily ignored in Burma. Yet U Nu was true to his commitments and showed no sign of willingness to abandon Israel. Shortly prior to U Nu's fall the British Ambassador in Rangoon commented, 'So long as U Nu remains in control he will not allow Burma to abandon Israel suddenly; but there are signs that the honeymoon is giving way to a more clear-headed relationship.'⁴⁵

So intense was the pressure exerted on U Nu that his statements regarding Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict had to be weighed carefully. In his meeting with Nasser at the beginning of 1962, U Nu raised the issue of the Palestinian refugees and said that Israel should allow their return to their homeland.⁴⁶ Disappointed at U Nu's suggestion, Ben Gurion blamed Nasser, saying that his sole aim was to dominate the Middle East and that he would use all means necessary to achieve his goals.⁴⁷

That the bilateral relations could not remain stable was largely due to the instability of the Burmese regime. U Nu was overthrown by Ne Win in 1960, and again in 1962.⁴⁸ Moreover, Ne Win's interpretation of socialism was far more strict and controlled than U Nu's.⁴⁹ Under Ne Win, Burma aspired to establish a socialist system akin to those practiced by the Soviet satellite states. The mild socialism practiced in Israel was no longer appealing to the Burmese regime. Besides, Ne Win embarked on a new policy orientation, the aim of which was to minimize connections with foreign countries and it was therefore inevitable that the connection with Israel would become the victim.

Concerned that the honeymoon was about to give way to a more even-handed approach, the Israelis sought to prevent the inevitable. Peres met the new leader and promised him to continue helping Burma in every way possible.⁵⁰ Israel's efforts to prevent deterioration in the bilateral relations continued relentlessly in the summer of 1962. The Israeli-Burmese Friendship Society was established with that specific objective in mind.⁵¹ However, there was growing realization in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the political change in Burma might sound the death knell for the bilateral relations.

At first, it appeared that Ne Win and his Socialist Progress Party would not yield to Nasser's attempts to convince them to limit their country's contacts with Israel.⁵² However, as soon as he came to power, Ne Win's government came under the influence of anti-US and anti-Western elements which pressed for a revision in the country's foreign relations. One of the most influential isolationists in Burma in the early 1960s was

U Ba Nyein. He led intellectuals and army officers who suspected that foreign powers were bent on exploiting the Burmese masses. In order to escape foreign domination, Nyein and his followers advocated a closed state with as little contact with the outside world as possible.⁵³ For most of his tenure until the middle of 1988, Ne Win was regarded by his people as Burma's supreme leader. Although he declared his hostility to communism he modeled his regime on the Stalinist autocratic style akin to the Soviet Union, Maoist China and Cuba. Thus Burma's foreign relations entered a new phase, lasting from 1962 until 1967, in which all Western ideas and institutions were rejected.⁵⁴ The new regime was bent on establishing an autocratic and highly regulated state socialism.⁵⁵ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Israel became less popular in Burmese government circles. Ne Win became much less interested in the Israeli projects and most of them were either curtailed or canceled. This was also part of an effort to mend fences with the Arab states.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, Arab pressure played a role in Burma's change of attitude. Evidence of such pressure abounds. In the spring of 1960, the Jordanian Finance Minister prohibited cooperation between Jordanian companies and their Burmese counterparts that traded with Israel.⁵⁷ Later that year, the Egyptian government extended an invitation to a commercial and industrial delegation from Burma.⁵⁸ Sources in the Israeli legation in Burma reported that the Egyptian Embassy was spreading anti-Israeli propaganda in the country. Among the propaganda items spread by the United Arab Republic (UAR) was a film depicting the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Unwilling to antagonize the Israelis, the Burmese government banned the film.⁵⁹ The same sources argued that the Egyptian Embassy paid the newspaper *Burman* for every propaganda article it wanted published.⁶⁰ A letter from the office of the Israeli Military Attaché in Rangoon stated that the Egyptian activities concentrated on propaganda and on an effort to expand commercial ties. It called upon the Israeli Defense Ministry to increase its personnel in Rangoon and to allocate more funds to counter the Egyptian propaganda campaign.⁶¹ While U Nu tended to ignore the anti-Israel campaign he could not avoid commenting on the Palestinian issue when confronted by Arab leaders. For example, in their meeting in Cairo in December 1961, Nasser and U Nu condemned the colonial policy pursued by the imperial powers in the Middle East and declared their unqualified support for the Palestinian people.⁶² This statement was made shortly after a meeting of the conference of nonaligned nations held in Belgrade in December 1961, and it was meant not only to satisfy Nasser but also the nonaligned countries, which often expressed discontent over Burma's close relations with Israel.

According to officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry who identified with his predicament, U Nu felt compelled to demonstrate a friendly attitude toward Nasser.⁶³ The approach of the Israeli Foreign Ministry was to demonstrate that Israel did not expect Burma to be less friendly to the Arabs. In one of his letters to the Israeli Embassy in Rangoon, Shimoni said, 'We must always emphasize that Israeli-Burmese relations by no means obliges Burma to diminish its friendship to the Arabs, or downgrade its ties with the Arab states.'⁶⁴

A more explicit attempt to distance Burma from Israel was made by Iraq shortly afterwards. An Iraqi official in London, who met the Burmese Ambassador at the end of December 1961, made an attempt to convince him to sever his country's diplomatic

relations with Israel. The Iraqi diplomat stated explicitly that Burma could not expect to remain friendly with the Arab states as long as it cooperated with Israel and maintained diplomatic representation in Tel Aviv.⁶⁵

On 1 January 1962, the Israeli Ambassador in Rangoon reported on increased Arab propaganda in Burma.⁶⁶ Aware of U Nu's admiration for Israel's technical support, Arab officials argued that they could provide Burma with all the support it needed, and when U Nu visited Egypt at that time his hosts boasted that they had all the experts that Burma might ever need.⁶⁷ At first, it seems as if Arab efforts were unsuccessful. In December 1962, a delegation from the Israeli defense establishment visited Burma. The aim of the visit was to resume contact with the Burmese military, which had ceased after the coup, but the Burmese were not as enthusiastic as they had been in the past. The Israeli guests managed to interest the Burmese military authorities in training facilities available in Israel, particularly in parachute jumping, but their hope to sell the Burmese Air Force obsolete Fouga-Magister training aircraft did not materialize. Initially, Burmese senior officers were highly impressed by the Israeli expertise, particularly by the kibbutz system, which they sought to adopt.⁶⁸ The delegation sought to persuade them to resume the program involving the setting up of some 15 military settlement camps based on the kibbutz model but only five or six were set up and the scheme was abandoned. The delegation left with the impression that their failure was due to Israel's pro-Western orientation.⁶⁹

In the spring of 1963, the Israeli Ambassador in Burma reported that despite expectations that the bilateral relations would deteriorate the Burmese government's attitude toward Israel's involvement in the country's development remained excellent.⁷⁰ However, later that year, Ne Win approached the Israeli Ambassador and expressed his fear that Israeli involvement in Burma would have an adverse effect on his socialist experiment.⁷¹ Displeased with the Burmese attitude toward the Israeli companies that operated in the country, Israel canceled Lubrani's appointment as the new Ambassador to Rangoon.⁷²

The bilateral relations began deteriorating rapidly when Ne Win accused the Israelis of wrongdoing. Ne Win's complaints about the Israelis were far more serious than the complaints made by other Asian leaders who argued that the Israelis lacked business ethics and that they had no sound long-range plans. He insinuated that the Israelis had sinister plans aimed at undermining his position. In his meeting with Israel's Ambassador in Tokyo he said that he had decided to pursue his style of socialism and no longer wanted to cooperate with any country in the world. Moreover, he argued that he had been betrayed by the Israelis who, in his view, came to Burma for the sole purpose of profit-making. He even went to the extent of accusing the Israelis of espionage. He complained that many Israeli experts spied on his country on Washington's behalf and collaborated with the socialists, his most formidable and dangerous opposition.⁷³ When the Burmese Revolutionary Council decided to nationalize the Burmese Economic Development Corporation the Israeli construction company Solel Boneh was ordered to cease all its activities in Burma.⁷⁴ Hoping that this would be a temporary setback in the bilateral relations, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials expressed hope that Solel Boneh would be able to resume its activities in other ways in the future.⁷⁵ However, the realists among them had come to realize that the 'honeymoon' of Israeli-Burmese relations was over.

In March 1964, the Israeli experts in Burma were instructed to leave the country.⁷⁶ In a letter to the Ministry of Defense, the Israeli Military Attaché, Colonel Asher Gonen complained that the dictatorial regime in Burma was deliberately discouraging economic growth. He argued that trade between the two countries was gradually diminishing due to severe government cutbacks on consumer goods and added that Israel could not compete with other suppliers who sold their products at a cheaper price.⁷⁷

Yet despite the decline in trade, the bilateral relations did not become particularly strained. In an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, Burma's Ambassador U La Wun argued that the fact that the bilateral relations had cooled off had nothing to do with Arab pressure, but was a consequence of an independent foreign policy posture which Burma's socialist regime decided to adopt in the 1960s. The new Ambassador argued that although many Asian and African countries severed their diplomatic relations with Israel after the Yom Kippur War, no significant change in Burma's policy had taken place. He boasted that in 1975 Burma abstained in the UN General Assembly's vote on the resolution equating Zionism with racism. Moreover, he explained that Burma's ability to conduct an independent foreign policy stemmed from the fact that it had oil in sufficient quantities and did not have to rely on the Arabs.⁷⁸ Indeed, there were strong indications that the Burmese government was attempting to conduct an independent foreign policy during the 1970s. Burma's official statements about the Arab-Israeli conflict were far less critical than most countries of the Afro-Asian bloc. For example, in his address at the General Assembly on 9 October 1972, U Lwin, Burma's Permanent Representative to the UN said,

As far as the Middle East situation is concerned, Burma views the stalemate as capable of sowing seeds of discord and generating unrest among the people in the region. This could erupt into violence and threaten the stability of their own countries as well as the peace and security in the world. In a year where so many sharp modifications have occurred in other areas of tension, it would be to the general relief of the international community, if the opponents in the Middle East were to rethink their position and respond to the trends of world détente. The problems of the Middle East are highly emotional and complex, and can only be resolved by peaceful means and not by armed force. To our mind, the Security Council resolution of 22 November 1967 continues to provide a sound basis for a peaceful settlement of the Middle East problem.⁷⁹

Burma made an attempt to appear in agreement with the Afro-Asian bloc, and like other nonaligned countries, its representatives spoke about the need to combat neocolonialism.⁸⁰ Moreover, they maintained friendly relations not only with the moderate Arab states but also with the radicals among them. In February 1976, Prime Minister U Sein Win met Iraq's Foreign Minister Sadoun Hamadi, who visited Rangoon.⁸¹ However, the meeting did not result in a condemnation of Israeli policy in the occupied territories, nor was there any reference to the plight of the Palestinian people. It was only after the PLO began to score diplomatic victories in the countries of the Afro-Asian bloc, which allowed it to open offices in their countries, that the Burmese government followed suit.

In the summer of 1977, the Burmese government allowed the PLO to open an office in Rangoon. However, it announced that the future Palestinian mission would not enjoy diplomatic status.⁸² Unlike other Asian countries whose official announcements contained frequent allusions to the plight of the Palestinian people, the Burmese official sources rarely referred to the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland or to Israel's methods of suppressing the Palestinian resistance. Even when Burma's representatives attended the meetings of the nonaligned nations their statements about the Arab-Israeli conflict were mild. Thus for example, in the nonaligned conference that was held in Belgrade on 28 July 1978, Burma's representative Brigadier General Myint Maung said,

Contrary to earlier expectation of some headway on the problem, the existing situation in the Middle East continues to be one of uncertainty and instability. We remain opposed to any territorial acquisition by war and support the call for the withdrawal of Israeli Armed Forces from the Arab territories occupied in 1967. We hold the view that only a comprehensive solution and the recognition of the rights of all states and peoples to an independent and secure life can bring a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.⁸³

What dictated moderation toward Israel was the dire economic condition in which the Burmese regime found itself. By the late 1970s, it had become abundantly clear that the 'revolutionary socialism' imposed by Ne Win's regime had left his country behind. Unemployment, inflation and corruption stifled its economic growth. In his report to the Socialist Party Congress, General San Yu announced that his country must try to find a remedy to its economic ills by seeking cooperation with other countries and investments from abroad.⁸⁴ Isolationism was increasingly regarded as detrimental to Burma's economic development and those who called for openness increased in number. Given these circumstances, it was imperative that Burma's cooperation with Israel should continue. Burma, like other Asian countries that sought rapprochement with Israel, believed that cordial relations meant greater leverage in Washington. Burma's contacts with Israel intensified and yielded positive results. On 29 April 1979 Foreign Minister Dayan visited Burma and met President Ne Win.⁸⁵ By the early 1980s the Burmese began to show an interest in reviving the rapprochement of former years. Despite concern about Arab reaction, the talks about commercial deals continued. The Burmese sought to benefit from Israel's expertise in high-tech and began signing contacts with Israeli companies. In the summer of 1984, the Israeli communications company Telrad was given a US\$5 million contract to install TMK-10 electronic digital public telephones in Burma. The deal was financed by the World Bank. Telrad's General Manager Gorion Meltzer stated that, 'Not only is this the first time that the World Bank has financed such an Israeli installation, but it is our first breakthrough into the Burmese market.'⁸⁶

Once again, the Burmese sought to learn from the Israeli experience in cooperative settlements. They asked for Israeli advice and sent students to learn in Israeli agricultural and scientific schools.⁸⁷ The two countries maintained embassies in Rangoon and Tel Aviv. However, this time the Israelis, who had learned from the mistakes in their previous experience, did not wish be involved in Burma beyond their ability.⁸⁸ Israeli-

Burmese relations continued, but they lacked the previous closeness and warmth. In August 1988, diplomats of the Israeli Embassy in Rangoon were told that they could continue their service but that their families would have to leave. Thus Menashe Zippori and Eli Ventura were forced to leave their families in Israel.⁸⁹

With Ne Win's departure in the summer of 1988, the Israelis became more optimistic that the rising democratic figures in Burma, which included U Nu whose premiership marked the heyday of Israeli-Burmese relations, would restore the friendship between the two countries to its former glory.⁹⁰ There were good reasons to be optimistic, largely due to the fact that the Burmese economy had deteriorated to such an extent that Burma plunged to the status of a Least Developed Country, eligible for soft international loans. The government's decision to cancel most of its bank notes caused many Burmese to lose their savings overnight. The discontent led to riots and demonstrations that even the brutal General Sein Lwin was unable to suppress. Unable to rely on Chinese arms, the Burmese military sought to purchase arms from other suppliers which included Singapore, Pakistan, South Africa, North and South Korea, the Czech Republic and Israel.⁹¹

The rise of the civilian Maung Maung, who was quickly evicted by General Saw Maung, led to further chaos and the parliament was dissolved. Although the National League for Democracy won an overwhelming victory in the 1990 elections, no true democracy was established. The government's decision to change the country's name to Myanmar mirrored its desire to turn its back on the colonial past and to place the country on the threshold of a new era. However, for any significant change to take place, Burma needed investments and foreign aid. These were precisely the reasons why officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry maintained their sense of optimism that the 'honeymoon' with Burma would soon resume. The Burmese regime, some of them argued, should find it easier to normalize relations with Israel since most Asian countries had already done so. However, despite the existence of formal relations, the Burmese did not seem eager to warm to Israel.

Asked what Israel's attitude should be toward the new oppressive Burmese regime, Peres said that the Israelis should remember the early days of friendship with that country and hope for improvement.⁹² Nevertheless, Israel is facing a dilemma, as an official in the Israeli Foreign Ministry told the author:

There is a problem with Burma. It is an outcast country. We must be cautious and not do anything contrary to US interests. Israel is maintaining an embassy in Burma, and the Burmese are maintaining an embassy in Israel. Telrad Company is operating there. But apart from that there is little contact between the two countries. The Burmese tend to concentrate on internal affairs.⁹³

Yet despite the coolness that continued to characterize the bilateral relations, the commercial dealings continued. In 1995 the Israeli Koor industries opened an office in Burma.⁹⁴ In June 1996, Telrad expanded its operations and signed a US\$10 million contract to provide and install digital public switchboard systems in Burma.⁹⁵

One of the main problems affecting Israel's success in Asia was the instability of the Asian regimes. Israel's experience with Burma has demonstrated how fragile bilateral

relations with autocratic regimes can be. While U Nu was in power the bilateral relations remained exceptionally warm but cooled off when Ne Win came to power. Burma's proximity to India and China, which had long maintained their distance from Israel, acted as a discouraging factor in the bilateral relations. Like many Asian nations, the Burmese government could not escape criticism by the Arabs as well as the nonaligned nations. In addition, the existence of powerful opposition groups in Burma who were sympathetic to Pan-Arabism and to Nasser's ambitions had an adverse affect on the country's relations with Israel. Moreover, Burma was not immune from Soviet and Chinese propaganda campaigns which discouraged it from being closely identified with Israel. Although most Burmese were ignorant of or indifferent to Zionist goals, many of them believed the rhetoric regarding the so-called collusion between Zionism and imperialism. Despite the fact that formal relations between the two countries are still maintained it is unlikely that they will return to their former glory. Even Burma's economic crisis and its desperate need for Israel's technical expertise are not likely to significantly improve the bilateral relations unless a stable democratic regime comes to power and the Middle East peace process gets back on track.

NOTES

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9. Fischl to Legation in Rangoon, ISA 2555/11, 7 February 1954.
10. Muang Nu to Sharett, ISA 2555/11, 17 June 1954; *New Times of Burma*, 22 June 1954; *Yediot Aharonot*, 26 June 1954.
11. Kyan Nyein to Barkatt, ISA 2555/11, 8 December 1954.
12. *The Seventh Anniversay of Burma*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (January 1955), p. ix.
13. Michael Fredholm, *Burma: Ethnicity and Insurgency* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), pp. 88–9, 93.
14. *The Guardian* (Rangoon), December 1957, p. 19.
15. *Ma'ariv*, 13 January 1955.
16. Frank N. Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic* (London: Pall Mall Press,

1966), p. 230.

17. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 10–17 December 1955, p. 14,585.

18. U Nu, *U Nu Saturday's Son* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 247.

19. *The Times*, 2 June 1955.

20. British Ambassador in Tel Aviv to Macmillan, PRO FO/371, 164305, VR10379/3, 7 June 1955.

21. Chi-shad Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 192–3.

22. U Ba Swe to Sharett, ISA 2561/5, 17 August 1956.

23. Asia's Department to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2561/5, 18 October 1956.

24. Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol. 4 (1955) (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1978), p. 1031 [Hebrew].

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6 (1956), p. 1,712.

26. *Jerusalem Post*, 16 September 1988.

27. Cited in Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 72.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

29. Muang Muang, *Burma and General Ne Win* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1969), p. 238.

30. 'Burma's Neutral Policy: By Prime Minister U Nu', *The Seventh Anniversary of Burma* (Government of the Union of Burma: Ministry of Information, 1956), p. 11.

31. U Nu, *Burma Looks Ahead: Translation of Selected Speeches by the Honorable U Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, delivered on various occasions from 19th July 1951 to 4th August 1952* (Government of the Union of Burma: Ministry of Information, 1953), p. 98.

32. Reacting to Arab pressure to cease all interaction with Israel and their threat not to support Burma in the United Nations, the British Ambassador in Rangoon said, 'This rather childish action is certainly not calculated to have the desired effect.' In a similar vein, a Burmese newspaper said that this initiative by the Arab League was evidence that this organization was narrow-minded and lacked political experience. British Embassy at Rangoon to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 164305, VR10379/1, 31 October 1956.

33. Cited in Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic*, p. 269.

34. One of the issues that occupied the Burmese Muslims was their rivalry with the Indian Muslims. In 1963, the Burmese Muslims claimed that funds from the *waqf* (Muslim religious charity endowment) were transferred to India and Pakistan and demanded that the government investigate the issue. They also protested that many Indian Muslims acquired Burmese citizenship for convenience and not for allegiance to Burma. Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972), p. 111.

35. The largest concentration of Muslim population is in Arakan State. Smaller Muslim populations are scattered throughout the cities, towns and rural areas of Burma. The Muslim community, which includes descendants of merchants and other lower-middle-class professions, tends to stay out of politics. Christina Fink,

- Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule* (Bangkok: White Lotus Company, 2001), p. 225.
36. Translation of a speech delivered by Premier U Nu in Parliament on 27 September 1957 (Government of the Union of Burma: Ministry of Information, 1958), p. 40. Cited in Liang, *Burma Foreign Relations*, p. 194.
37. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 193.
38. U Nu, *U Nu Saturday's Son*, p. 285.
39. David Hacothen, *Burmese Diary: 1953–1955* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1963), p. 356 [Hebrew].
40. Dayan, *Story of My Life*, p. 346.
41. 'A Short Introduction to Namsang Resettlement Project', an attachment to a letter from Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3304/22, 2 November 1961.
42. Cited in *Monthly Survey*, No. 12 (December 1961), p. 3.
43. David Hacothen, *Time to Tell, an Israeli Life 1898–1984* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1985), p. 218.
44. *U Nu, the Voice of Burma: Selected Writings* (Tel Aviv, Am Hasefer, 1961), p. 124 [Hebrew].
45. Allen to Home, PRO FO/371, 164305, ER103179, 27 December 1961.
46. U Nu to Ben Gurion, ISA 3392/36, 19 January 1962; Hancock to Home, PRO FO/371, 164305, ER103179/2, 5 February 1962.
47. Ben Gurion to U Nu, ISA 3392/36, 31 January 1962.
48. The change in Ne Win's policy toward Israel was somewhat surprising given the fact that the first impression he gave the Israelis was that he was shy and unassuming. A group of Israeli journalists who visited Burma in 1958 described him as 'the most press-shy of national leaders'. Cited in Helen G. Trager (ed.), *We the Burmese: Voices from Burma* (London: Praeger, 1969), p. 194.
49. Harriet O'Brien, *Forgotten Land: A Rediscovery of Burma* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), p. 217.
50. Memorandum on a discussion between Deputy Defense Minister Shimon Peres and General Ne Win, ISA 3392/36, 31 May 1962.
51. *Haboker*, 6 August 1962.
52. *Ma'ariv*, 15 October 1959.
53. John Badgley, 'Burmese Ideology: A Comment', in Josef Silverstein (ed.), *Independent Burma at Forty Years: Six Assessments* (Ithaca, NY: South Asia Program, 1989), p. 69.
54. Maung Maung Gyi, 'Foreign Policy Since 1962: Negative Neutralism for Group Survival', in F.K. Lehman (ed.), *Military Rule in Burma Since 1962: A Kaleidoscope of Views* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1981), pp. 12–19.
55. Aung Chin Win Aung, *Burma: The Last Days of General Ne Win* (Indianapolis, IN: Yoma Publishing, 1996), pp. 103–7.
56. Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 194.
57. Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem to Israeli Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3304/28, 14 April 1960.
58. Kedar to Israeli Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3304/28, 3 December 1960.

59. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3304/30, 10 August 1961.
60. Dagan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3304/30, 16 May 1960.
61. Vardi to Defense Ministry, ISA 3304/30, 25 January 1960.
62. 'Nasser-Nu—A Joint Statement on Palestine', ISA 3304/28, December 1961.
63. Shimoni to Ben Horin, ISA 3304/28, 30 June 1961.
64. Shimoni to Israeli Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3304/28, 22 May 1961.
65. *Al-Akhbar*, 31 December 1960; Kedar to Israeli Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3304/28, 24 January 1961.
66. Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3393/1, 24 January 1962.
67. *Ibid.*, 25 January 1962.
68. David I. Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), p. 71.
69. Hebblethwaite to Warner, PRO FO/371, 170528, ER103179, 28 December 1962.
70. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3392/36, 25 April 1963.
71. *Ibid.*, 20 June 1963.
72. Elitsur to Foreign Ministry, ISA 339236, 14 August 1963.
73. Lewin to Shimoni, ISA 3392/36, 15 December 1963.
74. *The Guardian*, 13 October 1963.
75. *Lamerhav*, 1 October 1963.
76. *The Nation*, 10 March 1964.
77. Gonen to Ministry of Defense, ISA 4001/26, 7 July 1966.
78. *Jerusalem Post*, 6 April 1976.
79. 'Burma at the United Nations', *Forward* (Rangoon), Vol. 11, No. 6 (1 November 1972), p. 6.
80. 'Burma-India Joint Communiqué', *Forward*, Vol. 12, No. 9 (1 June 1974), pp. 6–7.
81. 'Prime Minister Meets Iraqi Foreign Minister', *Forward*, Vol. XIV, No. 7 (1 April 1976), p. 3.
82. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 August 1977.
83. 'Burma Speaks at the Non-Aligned Nations Conference', *Forward*, Vol. 16, No. 12 (1 September 1978), p. 4.
84. *Jerusalem Post*, 18 April 1977.
85. 'Israeli Foreign Minister on Goodwill Visit', *Forward*, Vol. 17 (1 July 1979), pp. 12–13.
86. *Jerusalem Post*, 13 June 1984.
87. *Ibid.*, 12 July 1976; 8 March 1977.
88. *The Proud Jewess*, p. 276.
89. *Jerusalem Post*, 14 August 1988.
90. *Ibid.*, 31 August 1988.
91. Chi-shad Liang, 'Burma's Relations with the People's Republic of China: From Delicate Friendship to Co-operation', in Peter Carey (ed.), *Burma: The Challenge in a Divided Society* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 85.
92. Interview with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Israeli Television Network in Hebrew, 24 June 1995.
93. Author's interview with Choshen.
94. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 July 1995.

95. *Ibid.*, 17, 21 June 1996.

Singapore—Garrison States Connection

Several factors affected Israel's ties with Singapore: the strategic location of Singapore and its proximity to the Malayan mainland; the predominantly Chinese component of its population; and the country's traditional status as a free port. All these factors encouraged Singapore to assert its independence by adopting a foreign policy quite different from the one pursued by its neighbors. Yet Singapore was far from capable of disregarding criticism from its neighbors as well as from domestic opposition. The Singaporean government found it particularly difficult to ignore criticism from Malaysia, the country from which it seceded in 1965. This was largely because it continued to depend on the Malayan mainland for some of its major food items, water and natural gas. Malaysia remained the source of many raw materials such as timber, rubber, palm oil and tin, upon which Singapore's industrial development depended. In addition, Singapore was one of Malaysia's greatest investors. All these factors notwithstanding, Singapore was still capable of developing a unique foreign policy orientation in which relations with Israel became so prominent that Singaporean leaders became a target of an intense vilification campaign by groups and individuals in Malaysia as well as Singapore.

Several factors account for this unusually daring foreign policy. The influential People's Action Party (PAP) was highly pragmatic from the very beginning.¹ The PAP included many Anglophiles and anti-communists, which led the party to adopt a pro-Western orientation. In some ways, the PAP had many similarities with the Israeli left-of-center Mapai Party, both of which were strongly nationalist and socialist at the same time.² The fact that the party's leader Lee Kuan Yew was himself Chinese and not Muslim by origin made the rapprochement with Israel easier. Lee led the country from 1959, and even when he formally retired as Prime Minister on 26 November 1990, he continued to be influential in his capacity as the PAP's Secretary General and a senior Cabinet member. Moreover, Singapore remained practically a single-party state and despite strong opposition from the Workers' Party and the Singapore Democratic Party, the PAP's power remained virtually unchallenged. In addition to the quasi-autocratic nature of the Singaporean regime its cordial relations with the United Nations had a salutary effect on the bilateral relations. Officials in Washington had constantly encouraged Lee to maintain close ties with Israel. Singapore's relations with the United States were consistently cordial since the United States recognized the new republic at the time of its birth.³ Israel's ability to help Singapore bolster its position in the region by creating a well trained army was an asset that Washington had greatly appreciated and Lee could hardly afford to ignore. The fact that Singapore became increasingly integrated with the economic and financial centers of the Western world enhanced its association with Israel. Moreover, Singapore did not depend heavily on Arab oil and therefore had considerable freedom to promote strong ties with Israel. Singapore's commercial ties

with the Arab countries and those of the Persian Gulf in particular remained strong due to Lee's ability to bolster his country's economy with little regard for ideological considerations.

This chapter attempts to show how Lee managed to promote the political and economic position of his country with great skill and acumen, making full use of Israel's ability to help him create a well trained army. Lee's determination to maintain ties with Israel stemmed from his conviction that both countries were similar and he went to the extent of applying the Israeli model to his country.

As part of the Malayan Federation, Singapore had long maintained friendly relations with the Arab states. At the same time, Israel endeavored to offset Arab influence in Malaya and started a campaign aimed at opening an embassy in Singapore. Conceived by Shimoni, this idea had many supporters in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. However, fear of Malaya's reaction had a deterrent effect on Israeli diplomacy. In his letter to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, M.R.Kidron explained that since the British allowed the UAR to open an embassy in Singapore it was politically essential that Israel establish its own embassy there. He added that such a step would help Israel combat Arab propaganda.⁴ Eventually, Golda Meir became convinced that such a step was indeed necessary. However, Singapore's attitude was far from encouraging. Aware of the danger that both the Alliance coalition and the opposition party in Malaya would exploit the opportunity to ostracize him, Lee did not encourage the Israelis.

In the summer of 1961, the view in Jerusalem regarding the state of Israeli-Singapore relations was highly pessimistic. Shimoni explained that Singapore sought to join the Malay Federation and was therefore trying to do its utmost to satisfy the Malays, most of whom were Muslims who had reservations about Israel. Therefore, the Singaporean government feared that the establishment of a consulate would compound Malaya's difficulties and would thereby make it impossible for Singapore to be incorporated into the Federation.⁵ However, Lee did not refuse but asked Israel to 'freeze' its request to open a consulate.⁶ Highly discouraged by the Singaporean response, Kidron wrote to the Foreign Ministry that Israel's relations with Singapore had reached a point of diminishing returns. He argued that despite all the efforts and the generosity of the Israeli government no significant change in Singapore's attitude had taken place. Therefore, he recommended that Israel reassess its policy toward Singapore by the end of that year.⁷ The Israelis, however, did not give up hope and the diplomatic activity continued. Foreign Ministry officials tried to contact Malaya's leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman, in an attempt to convince him to consent to the opening of a consulate in Singapore. His response was that he would not have any objection to such a move if the request came from the Singaporean government.⁸ At the same time, Israeli officials contacted the British government and the response from London was that there were no objections to honoring the request.⁹ Nevertheless, Singapore remained reluctant to open the proposed consulate. At first it consented to the nomination of a consul of honor but even that proposal was withdrawn. Singapore's attitude triggered such an angry response in Jerusalem that some Foreign Ministry officials called not only for reassessment of Israel's policy but also for a reduction of its commitments in Singapore.¹⁰

That Israel's relations with Singapore remained cool was not only due to the latter's refusal to open an Israeli consulate but also to the fact that the Histadrut was not invited

to the first annual conference of the NTUC (Singapore's trade union movement). The conference discussed the refugee problem and reached a resolution that according to the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok 'was couched in language which takes no account whatever of the position and interest of Israel on this question'. The Ambassador added, 'I do not think that Israel merits such treatment at the hands of the trade union movement of Singapore: I also find it distressing that the trade union of Singapore should lend itself, however unwittingly, to the unrelenting Arab war against my country.'¹¹

Shortly before Singapore's secession from Malaysia, Lee headed a Malaysian delegation on a visit to Cairo, where he met Nasser. During the visit, the Egyptian government pledged to do its utmost to help settle the differences between Malaysia and Indonesia and Nasser accepted an invitation to visit Malaysia.¹² Interestingly enough, the joint communiqué issued by the two governments did not include anti-Israeli expressions. The Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok recorded with amazement that 'The one ray of hope in it for us is that it does not contain the usual anti-Israel nonsense, and Lee is to be admired for standing up to the pressure which I have no doubt was exerted on him.'¹³

There was little hope for rapprochement between the two countries as long as Singapore remained in the Malaysian Federation. While Singapore was part of the Federation Lee's policy was in line with the Third World countries.¹⁴ Singapore's desire to participate in the Afro-Asian Conference that was scheduled to convene in Algiers in November 1965 had further delayed the rapprochement between the two countries because Lee feared that diplomatic relations with Israel would antagonize the Arabs whose numerous votes could determine Singapore's admission.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials sought to approach Singapore by capitalizing on its differences with Malaysia. Therefore, immediately after Singapore's independence from Malaysia in 1965, Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol conveyed Israel's recognition of independent Singapore.¹⁶ This step marked the beginning of remarkably solid relations between the two countries. The importance of establishing cordial relations with Singapore becomes obvious from the attitude expressed by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. In his letter to the economic adviser in the Israeli Embassy in Washington, the Director of the Asian Division writes, 'It is extremely important to maintain and warm up the contacts with the Singaporeans there and they might apply to you with concrete matters. There is a good prospect to develop the ties with Singapore and this might be beneficial for us.'¹⁷ Singapore's policy toward Israel did not seem consistent in that period. The economic adviser in Washington reported on that inconsistency saying that while the Singaporean government suggested that the two countries start by establishing a commercial representation in an attempt to downplay the political character of the bilateral relations, it gave a diplomatic character to that representation by calling it a 'legation' and by exchanging notes with it in an obvious diplomatic manner.¹⁸

Full diplomatic relations with Israel were established immediately after Singapore's secession from Malaysia.¹⁹ However, Singapore kept a low profile for almost 30 years, until Malaysia's relations with Israel began to improve.²⁰ Throughout the entire period, officials in Kuala Lumpur constantly criticized Singapore's relations with Israel. The Malay press was replete with articles condemning Lee's 'unholy alliance' with Israel. Criticism came from the Muslim opposition as well as from the Alliance coalition in Malaysia. Particularly critical was the PMIP (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party), whose

members had constantly castigated Lee for what they regarded as collaboration with the Zionist and imperialist Jewish state. The Muslim opposition used the Israeli-Singaporean connection as a way to discredit the Alliance coalition. The matter was hotly debated in the Malaysian government and caused frequent uproar.²¹ Yet Lee continued to maintain connections with Israel throughout, even when many countries decided to sever their diplomatic relations with it and denounced its occupation of Arab land.

An attempt to determine which small countries could serve as a model for Singapore brought Israel and Switzerland to the top of the list. Concerned about reaction from Malaysia, Lee appealed to Nasser and India's Prime Minister Lal Bahdur Shastri for help. Their refusal provided him the excuse he needed in order to contact Israel.²² Israel had several advantages that made it an attractive ally. It had a well disciplined and efficient army, which was under strict civilian control. Moreover, the fact that the army did not interfere in Israeli politics captured Lee's attention. Lee was highly impressed by Ben Gurion's ability to unite all paramilitary factions that existed in the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel and to form one army with a unique *esprit de corps*. Israel had other salient features of a progressive country such as labor unions which, despite their enormous power, were still under government control. Moreover, he regarded Israel as a civilized hub in the middle of the primitive Arab world. In his eyes, Israel had something in common with the sophisticated city-states of Athens and Venice, which he greatly admired. All these features led Lee to conclude that Israel was tightly knit and a well organized community, which he wanted to imitate.²³

Knowing that he could benefit from Israel's military experience in order to build Singapore's armed forces, Lee called upon Israel to send military experts. The agreement signed between the two countries provided that Israel would send six officers to train the Singaporean forces.²⁴ The Israelis proved equal to the task. In a letter to Israel's Defense Minister, Goh Keng Swee expressed his sincere thanks for 'all that you and your Defense Forces have done to assist us in this very complicated task of raising our armed forces'.²⁵ Singapore's Total Defense Doctrine was conceived after consultation with the Israeli experts. Singapore copied Israel's recruitment strategy and decided to adopt compulsory military service for all Singaporean males 18 years of age or older. Legislation to that effect was passed in 1967.²⁶ Moreover, it formed a reserve force of army veterans modeled on the IDF's reserve. A Singapore Armed Force Training Institute was opened at Jurong in 1966, and Israeli military advisers were invited to train its recruits.²⁷

The introduction of military service of between 24 and 30 months provided Singapore with an impressive army.²⁸ Seeking to capitalize on its technological edge over its neighbors, the Singaporean government decided to put the emphasis on a modern air force equipped with state-of-the-art technology capable of giving the Singaporean Air Force total command in the air.²⁹ Israel's sweeping victory in the Six Day War after an initial air strike, which destroyed the aircraft of all surrounding Arab countries on the ground, underscored the importance of developing an efficient air force for Singapore.

Singapore's cooperation with Israel intensified as a result of the Six Day War, and enraged Nasser and other Arab leaders. Arab diplomats made frequent appearances in Singapore in an attempt to dissuade Lee from being closely associated with Israel. What irritated the Arab states the most was that Singapore remained friendly to Israel when many Asian and African countries were castigating Israel for its refusal to comply with

United Nations Resolution 242, while others were hoping to pass more radical resolutions, requiring Israel's expulsion from the UN.³⁰ Indeed, it was a daring and provocative decision on Lee's part to be so completely identified with Israel after the Arab states had suffered such a humiliating defeat. By its rapprochement with Israel, Singapore had alienated all nonaligned nations and was therefore a subject of condemnation in all of their meetings. Yet, despite all odds, the Singaporean government continued to nurse the new relationship. In October 1967, Lee announced his decision to regard Israel as his country's model. In his address at the meeting of the Socialist International he said:

We made a study of what smaller countries surrounded by large neighbors with big populations do for their own survival. The study eventually led us to compare three such tightly knit communities—Switzerland, Finland and Israel. In the end, Singapore opted for the Israeli pattern, for in our situation it appears necessary not only to train every boy, but also every girl to be a disciplined and effective digit in the defence of their country.³¹

Singapore's Ambassador to Washington, Won Lin Ken, compared Singapore's predicament to Israel's, saying that both countries were surrounded by a vast ocean of Muslims, and praised Israel's willingness to train Singapore's armed forces.³² The Singaporean government maintained friendly relations with Israel despite unrelenting pressure not only from the Arab countries but also from local Muslim organizations and individuals to reverse that trend.³³ Yet Lee found it necessary to make some adjustments. Unwilling to intensify Malaysia's hostility toward Singapore, Lee was forced to keep a low profile in his relations with Israel. Therefore, Singapore's official foreign policy statements regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict became more carefully worded. For example, in an interview with the author, Mark Hong, Singapore's Deputy Representative in the UN Mission said:

We have been friendly with Israel because Israel was the only country that provided us with military assistance when we obtained our independence. We maintained cordial relations with Israel despite unrelenting Muslim pressure. However, we have sympathy toward the Palestinians. Our frame of reference is UN Resolution 242 regarding the Middle East.³⁴

Lee continued to rely on Israeli military advisers and instructors. Appreciating the importance of having to maintain friendly ties with a country situated in a predominantly Muslim region, close to Malaysia, Indonesia and the strategically located Straits of Malacca, the Israelis responded with alacrity and expressed willingness to assist the Singaporean army and train its personnel. Cooperation agreements to that effect were signed between the two countries in the spring of 1967.³⁵ The results were impressive. Israel helped set up the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute and on 18 July 1967, a group of 114 Singaporean officers completed their training with the help of Israeli instructors.³⁶ Within two years, Singapore had built up an impressive cadre of young officers and four battalions of infantry. This was in addition to the territorial-type People's Defense Force and the Vigilantes for civilian defense tasks.³⁷

The fact that by 1968 the British accelerated the process of withdrawal from the empire and therefore sought a reduction of their forces in Asia caused concern in Singapore and intensified Lee's interest in expanding the cooperation with Israel.³⁸ However, the Singaporean government continued to keep a low profile on this issue. Therefore, the names of the Israeli trainers and advisers were not revealed. The first Israeli advisers to arrive in the country were said to have been 'Mexican agricultural advisers'. Nevertheless, the Malaysians were fully aware of the extent of Israel's aid to Singapore. On 2 September 1968, Israel's Ambassador in Bonn had informed the Israeli Foreign Ministry that 'the Malaysians follow with envy the Israeli aid which contributes to strengthening Singapore's military power'.³⁹ Nor did Malaysia disregard the trade agreement which Israel signed with Singapore on 24 April 1968.⁴⁰

In addition to his concern regarding Malaysia's response to his connection with Israel, Lee feared that the confrontation between the predominantly Chinese and non-Chinese Singaporeans would be regarded as similar to the conflict between Arabs and Jews. Indeed, some of Lee's enemies were quick to capitalize on this comparison.⁴¹ The *Utusan Melayu*, Malaysia's largest newspaper in the Malay language, accused Lee of trying to turn Singapore into another Israel and suppressing Muslims. The newspaper argued that Singapore's defense budget in 1970 was US\$300 million and that it possessed Bloodhound missiles, jet fighters and light Israeli arms. It added that, 'Just as Israel equips itself with American aid against what it claims to be a threat from Arab countries, similarly Singapore prepares itself.'⁴²

Lee continued to face criticism for promoting Israel as a model for his socialist experiment in Singapore.⁴³ His critics argued that his goal was to establish an elitist, superior, rugged and militarized state. Malaysia's President Muhammad Mahatir attacked Lee for treating his country as an enemy and for employing Israeli mercenaries.⁴⁴ Similarly, Malaysia's spokesman in the United Malay National Organization reacted to Singapore's rapprochement with Israel by saying that Singapore was 'trying to create an Israeli state for the purpose of suppressing the Malays. As happened in Israel where Muslims were pressed down and suppressed by the Israelites, so are the tactics of the PAP government in trying to launch a war of nerves between the races.'⁴⁵ Another critic, Minister of Information and Broadcasting of the Alliance coalition, Inche Senu bin Abdul Rahman made disparaging remarks about Singapore's reliance on Israeli advisers.⁴⁶

Lee had great admiration for the young Jewish state that with only meager resources managed to survive in the midst of a hostile Arab world. Israel's stunning victory in the Six Day War intensified his admiration. His reference to Israel as a model country was no mere rhetoric and he apparently tried not only to learn from the Israelis how to build a formidable army but also how to fashion a political and social system akin to Israel's.⁴⁷ The allusion to Israel as a model country was shared by many Singaporean leaders who became accustomed to comparing their country to Israel. Lee had often expressed fears that Singapore with its large Chinese population would turn into 'A South-East Asia's Israel' with many enemies.⁴⁸ Soon the phrase became common in the parlance of his party.⁴⁹ Such comparison, however, was often intimidating, leading some PAP members to advocate a merger with the Federation of Malaysia, since they feared that Singapore might become what they called 'an independent Israel in South-East Asia'.⁵⁰

In 1968 an Israeli trade office was opened in Singapore and by 1969 an Israeli

Ambassador presented his credentials to the Singaporean government. The cooperation between the two countries expanded into many fields, including the military. Israel began to send Singapore used military hardware, including tanks and missiles. It also gave Singapore the authorization to produce arms. In addition, Singapore was chosen as the main Mossad station in Asia.⁵¹ However, within a short period of time Lee reached the conclusion that Israel's presence in his country was becoming more of a liability than an asset. By the early 1970s, it became abundantly clear that the Israeli position in the region was becoming tenuous. The Israelis were not welcome to the Muslims in Singapore, who often protested against their presence. There were even attempts to bomb the Israeli Embassy in Singapore.⁵² The PAP's unpopularity increased and Lee was vilified not only by his political opponents but also by some members of his own party. Therefore, he thought it prudent to terminate the Israeli presence. At the height of its involvement in Singapore, Israel had 45 military advisers but their number was reduced to 11 and later to three who eventually returned to Israel.⁵³

By the early 1970s, Singapore's Middle East policy had changed radically. A process of rapprochement with the states of the region began in earnest. In 1970, the Singaporean government provided tax incentives designed to encourage its citizens to invest in Malaysia and Indonesia. In 1972, Lee visited Malaysia and in the following year Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak visited Singapore. In 1972, the two countries decided to form a joint airline. Their common currency and main commercial enterprises were joined as well. In addition, they declared their intention to protect the Straits of Malacca and to combat communist subversion and illicit drug trafficking. A similar process of rapprochement with Indonesia began shortly afterwards. In 1973, Lee visited Indonesia for the first time in 13 years. The visit resulted in a rapid rapprochement between the two countries. After attending a solemn ceremony at the graves of two marines executed by Singapore five years earlier, Lee and Indonesia's President Raden Suharto held friendly talks and issued a joint communiqué expressing their desire for friendship and regional solidarity. Suharto reciprocated with a visit in the following year. The three countries came to the realization that there was much more to be gained by cooperation than by hostility. Their main fear was the spread of communism in Singapore and therefore they decided to settle their differences.

Seeking to reduce the tension between Singapore and its neighbors, Lee decided to end Israel's involvement in Singapore and the last Israeli advisers were asked to leave.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, Lee's decision was a blow to Israel's prestige but it did not come as a shock. Moreover, the move had little impact on the commercial relations between the two countries. Even the Arab boycott did not seriously affect the commercial exchange. According to Jan Pinsler, the Honorary Secretary of the Diamond Exchange of Singapore, Israel provided about 40 percent of Singapore's total supply.⁵⁵

The early 1970s witnessed a change in Singapore's policy not only toward its neighbors but also toward the Arab states. Lee's sense of pragmatism led to soul-searching regarding Singapore's policy in West Asia. In the period between 1973 and 1975 the Singaporean government embarked on a reassessment which resulted in an adjustment of its policy in the region. What caused this change in policy was Singapore's greater dependence on Arab oil in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, which ushered in a new period of rising oil prices. Singapore's Foreign Minister S.Rajaratnam visited

several countries in the region. The visits, according to Singapore's official yearbook of 1975, 'minimized areas of mutual ignorance and cleared misunderstanding'. In order to demonstrate its willingness to mend fences with the Arab states the Singaporean government assured the Arab countries that it would support their demand for an Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967.⁵⁶ The Singaporean government's statements about its desire for peace in the Middle East based on withdrawal from Arab land became more frequent. Yet Lee had no intension of distancing his country from Israel and thereby forgoing the opportunity to benefit from its technical expertise.

In November 1978, Israelis were invited to participate in the Sixth International Students Photographic Salon scheduled to be held in Singapore the following year.⁵⁷ Israel sought to expand its contacts with Singapore to the political field in order to prevent further deterioration in the bilateral relations. By the end of the 1970s, the atmosphere in the Middle East began to change when Sadat arrived in Jerusalem. This change allowed Lee to promote better relations with Israel with few recriminations from the Arab world. When the Camp David peace accords were signed the following year, Dayan paid a visit to Singapore to discuss the treaty with Lee.⁵⁸ The Singaporean government hailed the Camp David agreement as a major step in the peace process and expressed hope that the process would continue.⁵⁹ In the autumn of 1981, Singapore's Education Minister Tia Aing-Sun met his Israeli counterpart, Zevulun Hammer, and they agreed to extend the educational and scientific ties between the two countries.⁶⁰ The commercial relations between the two countries intensified as well but there were occasional difficulties. Although Israel encouraged trade with Singapore, trade officials were concerned that Israel might become a dumping ground for goods produced in Singapore. When the Israeli Crystal Company tried to block the import of refrigerators into Israel, Singaporean officials protested vigorously.⁶¹ However, this proved to be a temporary setback and the cooperation between the two countries continued to expand. Trade union leaders continued to visit Israel and the Histadrut became instrumental in contributing to closer cooperation between the two countries.⁶² In 1982, it hosted the Singapore Cooperative Movement.⁶³ The comments made by Packrisami Ramasamy, Chairman of the Singapore National Cooperative Federation, shed light on the pragmatic nature of the bilateral relations. He explained why his movement was interested in cooperating with Israel, saying, 'We got together because we know Israel could help us on trade union and cooperative issues, and from there the friendship grew.' He argued that Singapore's relative independence from Arab influence helped cement the relations between the two countries. He said, 'We have nothing to do with the Arab states except possibly for buying oil, and even that's indirect because we have a large oil refinery, and the American oil companies buy the oil from the Arabs and bring it to Singapore for refining.'⁶⁴ Yet despite the growing optimism in Jerusalem the rapprochement with Singapore was not entirely rewarding. During the summer of 1983 there was a considerable decline in Israeli exports to Singapore.⁶⁵ In addition, Israel resented Singapore's voting pattern in the United Nations. Therefore, in February 1984, Kimche visited Singapore to discuss the issue with Lee.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Israelis were realistic enough to understand Lee's predicament and did not demand nor expect Singapore's official stand to change. As it turned out, the voting issue did not have a serious impact on the trade exchange. The collaboration between the two countries continued and

expanded to the medical field as well.⁶⁷ By 1986, Singapore's Foreign Minister Suppiah Dhanabalan arrived in Israel for an official visit. The Israeli hosts took the opportunity to urge the visitor to convince his government to open an embassy in Israel.⁶⁸ Singapore's President visited Israel and in the same year Herzog paid an official visit to Singapore.

An additional factor facilitating better relations between the two countries was the status of Jews in Singapore. The Jews of Singapore had long enjoyed freedom and toleration, and some had reached positions of power. A prominent example of this was the career of David Marshal, a Jew of Sephardic origin who was the first to become publicly elected Chief Minister of Singapore and held that office from April 1955 to June 1956. Marshal headed the Labor Front whose aim was to obtain a greater measure of self-government from Great Britain.⁶⁹ He resigned after failing to obtain self-government at the constitutional talks with the British Colonial Office in April 1956.⁷⁰ The extent to which the Singaporean government was sensitive to Jewish concerns was remarkable. Thus for example, when the Singaporean government sought to obtain land occupied by the owners of an old Jewish cemetery in order to build a subway system, Lee ordered the community to re-inter its dead elsewhere. This enterprise was carried out with the collaboration of the Israeli burial service agency, Chevra Kadisha, and the Jewish community was compensated generously according to the land's value.⁷¹

Overall, Israel's relations with Singapore remained cordial throughout the years. The Israelis became quite visible in Singapore not only as tourists but also as businessmen and professionals. In an air show held in January 1985, 24 Israeli companies exhibited a variety of products.⁷² According to a report by the Israeli Ministry of Trade and Industry, Israel's exports to Singapore grew to US\$41.5 million during the first months of 1985, a 38 percent increase over the same period in the previous year.⁷³ The Israelis increasingly regarded Singapore as a great emporium for their trade with South-East Asia and a point of contact.⁷⁴ Many international trade shows were held in Singapore, which also served as a major transit and communication center in the region. Israel sought to use its contact with Singapore in order to expand its trade relations with other countries in the region. Thus for example, Israel's participation in the Asian Aerospace Exhibition held in Singapore in January 1986 was meant to attract many Chinese visitors.⁷⁵ By the end of 1985, trade with Singapore began to loom larger in the eyes of Israeli officials. Max Livnat of the Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade became convinced that Singapore should be given the same priority as that of the United States in Israel's exports drive.⁷⁶

Singapore purchased from Israel many high-tech products in addition to diamonds and chemicals. Israeli imports from Singapore included coffee, tea, spices, oils, fuels and coconuts. However, while trade continued to grow Singapore continued to maintain a cautious foreign policy toward the Middle East. Fearful of criticism from Muslim countries, the Singaporean government maintained a low profile in its dealings with Israel but did not yield to pressure demanding that its relations with Israel be severed. However, Singapore's flirtation with Israel led to complications unforeseen by Lee. The most high-visibility incident was Herzog's visit. By the end of 1984, Singapore agreed to host Herzog in May 1985. In order to save Lee from embarrassment, Israel agreed to his requirement that the visit would include other states besides Singapore. Twice the Israelis delayed the visit and when it eventually took place a great uproar ensued. Malaysia's leaders pressured Lee to cancel the visit,⁷⁷ and Muslim organizations like the Democratic

Action Party protested vigorously.⁷⁸

Convinced that canceling or delaying the visit would intensify the criticism from his neighbors, Lee refused to yield⁷⁹ but at the same time he continued to portray a pro-Palestinian image. President Wee Kim Wee supported Lee's position, arguing that the Palestinian problem was one of the root causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While stating his willingness to recognize Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries he said that he expected it to withdraw from territories occupied in the Six Day War and opposed all Israeli measures aimed at altering the character and status of Jerusalem.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, these declarations failed to silence Lee's opponents both in Singapore and Malaysia. The Malaysian opposition urged the government to cut the air and rail links to Singapore for three days as a protest. Moreover, Malaysia recalled its Ambassador for consultations and went as far as reviewing its ties with Singapore.⁸¹ Both Malaysia and Indonesia regarded Herzog's visit as 'provocative' and argued that the unity of ASEAN (the Association of South-East Asian Nations) as an economic and political alliance comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Brunei could be in jeopardy.⁸² Besides, the announcement regarding Herzog's visit was made by the Israeli Embassy in Singapore when Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir's anti-Zionist crusade reached its peak.⁸³ The Malay community in Singapore was no less critical of the government's decision to allow Herzog to visit the country.⁸⁴ Many questioned Lee's political acumen and wondered whether Singapore's relations with Israel were sufficiently important to warrant alienating countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.⁸⁵ What irked the Singaporeans most was not that their association with Israel was adversely affected but the implication that Malaysia was infringing on their sovereignty.⁸⁶ All indications suggest that Lee was convinced that Herzog's visit would not have such a detrimental effect on Singapore's relations with its neighbors. Mahathir may have believed that Lee knew about the visit and concealed it from him. Lee's government's response was that it had done nothing wrong and even expressed regret over the incident. Mahathir, who did not wish to alienate US businessmen in Malaysia, was willing to downplay the matter and tried to restrain the anti-Singaporean sentiment.⁸⁷

Unwilling to completely ignore Malaysia's demands, Lee sent Mahathir an advanced copy of a state reception address to Israel. A spokesman for the Singaporean government explained at the reception that although some of the remarks were not to Israel's liking, they had to be made in order to appease Malaysia on whose water resources Singapore depended. At the same time, he stated that his country was interested in benefiting from Israeli know-how.⁸⁸ Although it was overtly hostile to Israel (it voted against Israel in almost all UN resolutions), Singapore did not allow its commercial relations with Israel to end. In fact, the volume of trade between the two countries continued to grow. Exports from Israel to Singapore during 1986 were over US\$50 million.⁸⁹ But when Israel's Foreign Ministry Director General Avraham Amir attempted to convince the Singaporean government to open an embassy, or at least to appoint a trade attaché to Tel Aviv, Trade Minister Lee Hsien Loong rejected the idea.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, trade between the two countries continued to expand. In 1990 Israel's export trade to Singapore reached US\$106.5 million. The bulk of these exports consisted of high-tech products and precious stones. This was an increase of 40.7 percent from 1989.

Prior to the Gulf War Singapore condemned Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and

on 24 August 1990 it began enforcing UN sanctions on Iraq.⁹¹ Believing that rapprochement with Israel could earn him handsome dividends in Washington, Lee continued to promote good relations with Israel. In addition, the Singaporean government became increasingly interested in technological exchange with Israel. As Lee Hsien Loong said, 'We need to continually acquire and employ higher levels of science and technology, to make more efficient use of our resources and move on to higher value added economic activities.'⁹² Singapore's Middle East policy was largely determined by this need. Nevertheless, the value of the bilateral trade still did not satisfy the Israelis. During the Gulf War there was about a 10 percent decline in exports but this was regarded as a temporary setback. In fact, some Israeli officials argue that the real figure was 50 percent higher. In the same year, Israeli imports from Singapore reached US\$57.7 million. These imports consisted mainly of industrial machinery, rubber and plastic. This represented a 47 percent increase over 1989. Singaporean businessmen continuously argued that Israel's bureaucratic procedures and clumsy business practices prevented it from becoming a bigger trading partner. In 1991 Israel's trade with Singapore totaled US\$79 million in exports and US\$143 million in imports.⁹³

In May 1994, Lee visited Israel and met Rabin, who called him the 'Ben Gurion of Singapore'.⁹⁴ He also took the opportunity to express gratitude for Israel's assistance, saying, 'We were fortunate that the IDF started providing basic training to the Singaporean armed forces, because the two countries have similar needs; to maintain a well trained force incorporated in the civilian sector, and in a state of constant alert. This basic similarity turned the IDF ideal for our purposes [*sic*].'⁹⁵ In a conversation with Rabin, Lee admitted that pressure from Muslim countries was a factor limiting the degree of cooperation between the two countries. He did not mention any specific country, but said, 'Large parts of South-East Asia are Muslim, or under pro-Muslim governments. Whatever was not possible in the past is possible now due to the peace process.'⁹⁶ Rabin invited Lee to take part in the multilateral peace talks and asked that Singapore open an embassy in Israel. Seeking to avoid commitments at that point Lee argued that his country suffered from a severe lack of trained diplomats. He ended his visit by inviting Israeli businessmen to take part in joint projects in Singapore.⁹⁷ Singapore continued to maintain contacts with Israel and military cooperation has continued ever since.⁹⁸

By the turn of the century Mahathir moderated his approach and there was a slight improvement in Israeli-Malaysian relations. Consequently, Lee had no need to fear Malaysian reaction. In July 2000 Singapore agreed to sign a US\$1 billion deal with Israel to develop surveillance satellites. Israel agreed to provide the technology of its major high-tech firms while Singapore agreed to provide the funding.⁹⁹ Opposition to Lee's contacts with Israel continued but it was confined to the opposition Muslim parties. For a while it seemed that the criticism against Lee's pro-Israel policy had subsided and the opponents of rapprochement with Israel had lost their former persuasive power. However, the failure of the Middle East peace process and the outbreak of the Intifada al-Asqa compelled the Singaporeans to keep a lower profile.

This brief survey of the bilateral relations has demonstrated that both countries had compelling reasons for maintaining close ties. Singapore's location in the midst of countries with large Muslim populations hostile to Israel had turned it into an attractive candidate for friendship. Israel's quest for better relations with these countries enhanced

Singapore's importance. Singapore's Western orientation and its robust economy had provided further incentive for the Israelis. Singapore had no less compelling reasons for rapprochement with Israel. Its isolation in a predominantly Muslim region compelled it to search for a new identity. For Singapore, the connection with Israel was an integral part of its attempt to assert its independence from Malaysia and demonstrate its unique character.¹⁰⁰ Several factors contributed to the apparent similarities between the two countries. Their isolation in the midst of a large concentration of Muslim populations and the ideologies adopted by the dominating parties in each country were similar, as was their pro-Western orientation. Yet the ties between the two countries were not based on theoretical foundations. It was largely Singapore's need to build a powerful army that attracted it to Israel. Singapore's close relations with the United States and its relative immunity from Arab punitive measures allowed it greater freedom in foreign policy. Furthermore, Singapore managed to portray an image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Its pro-Palestinian declarations and its insistence on Israel's compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 did not seem to harm its ties with Israel, particularly when most nations, even those friendly to Israel, made similar statements.

The onset of the peace process has simplified matters and for a while it seemed unlikely that the rapprochement would be under threat. However, the eruption of violence in the occupied territories in the autumn of 2000 put the Singaporean government on alert again. When Netanyahu asked to visit Singapore on his way to China the Singaporean government refused to welcome him, saying that the time was not convenient for such a visit. A Singaporean official admitted that the real reason was the deadlock in the peace process.¹⁰¹ The future course of the bilateral relations seems to depend not only on a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also on Singapore's relations with its neighbors.

NOTES

1. For a detailed analysis of the party's resort to pragmatism see Beng-Huat Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 57–78.
2. The striking similarities between Mapai and the PAP can be understood by comparing two major studies by Peter Y. Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organization and Government in a New Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), and Chan Heng Chee, *The Dynamics of One Party Dominance: The PAP at the Grassroots* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976).
3. United States Recognition of Singapore as a Sovereign Independent State: Message from the Secretary of State (Rusk) to the Foreign Minister of Singapore (Raja Ratnam), 11 August 1965. *American Foreign Policy Current Documents 1965* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), Document No. IX-83, p. 817. US—Singapore relations became even closer after the fall of the Soviet Union, when Singapore offered the United States the use of its military facilities if those in the Philippines could not be used. In his meeting with Vice President Dan Quayle in Tokyo, in November 1990, Lee agreed to allow US naval units to use the

- Sembawang dockyard for repairs. He also allowed the US Air Force to use his country's airports for its training missions. What endeared Lee in Washington's eyes was that he had demonstrated a strong preference for market economy and an intense aversion to communism. Under Lee's leadership the communists were persecuted and Singapore's ties with the states of South-East Asia became stronger.
4. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3334/6, 16 July 1961.
 5. Shimoni to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3334/6, 23 July 1961.
 6. Shimoni to Israel's Consul in London, ISA 3334/6, 3 August 1961.
 7. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3334/6, 4 August 1961.
 8. Lourie to Shimoni, ISA 3334/6, 27 November 1961.
 9. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office. PRO FO371, 164312, ER1061/1, 1 January 1962.
 10. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3426/38, 18 April 1962.
 11. Kidron to Lee, ISA 3426/38, 17 October 1962.
 12. 'Joint Communiqué on Talks Conducted in Cairo Between Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore and Head of the Malaysian Delegation and the Responsible Officials in the U.A.R.', *Arab Political Encyclopedia: Documents and Notes*, 12th Year, (November 1963–February 1964), United Arab Republic, Information Department, p. 54.
 13. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA, 17 May 1962.
 14. Jean-Louis Margolin, 'Foreign Models in Singapore's Development and the Idea of a Singaporean Model', in Gary Rodan (ed.), *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 88.
 15. Foreign Ministry to Kedar, ISA 3572/25, 3 October 1965.
 16. Eshkol to Lee, ISA 3572/25, n.d.
 17. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4047/19, 15 December 1967.
 18. *Ibid.*, 24 December 1967.
 19. According to Kidron, who served as the Israeli Ambassador in Singapore, the formal ties began in 1959, and the military ties in 1965. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4220/3, 17 January 1968.
 20. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
 21. Malay politicians hostile to Lee used the Singapore-Israel analogy to denigrate him. For example, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting of the Alliance Party of Malaya, Inche Senu bin Abdul Rahman mocked Singapore, stating that its position was like that of Israel in the Arab world, and accused Lee of relying on Israeli advisors. *Straits Times*, 30 July 1966.
 22. James Minchin, *No Man is an Island* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 180, 239.
 23. Ian Buchanan, *Singapore in Southeast Asia: An Economic and Political Appraisal* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1972), p. 267.
 24. Agreement between the Government of Singapore and the Government of Israel, ISA 3572/25, 31 December 1965.
 25. Goh to Defense Minister, ISA 3572/25, 30 November 1965.
 26. C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819–1988* (Singapore: Oxford University

Press, 1989), p. 294.

27. John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success* (Singapore: Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 396.

28. Singapore's army had 56,000 men. By comparison, the Malaysian army had no more than 125,000 for a population six times bigger. In 1984, Singapore had a reserve corps of 150,000 men compared to Malaysia with only 61,000 and the Philippines with 118,000. Most reservists were about 40 years of age and officers were about 50 years of age. Jean-Louis Margolin, *Singapore 1959–1987: Genèse d'un nouveau pays industriel* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1989), p. 139.

29. Christopher Linge and Kurt Wickman, 'Political Economy', in Michael Haas (ed.), *The Singapore Puzzle* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), p. 69; Linge and Wickman, 'Mass Society', *ibid.*, p. 168.

30. Author's interview with Mark Hong, Singapore's Deputy Representative in the UN Mission, New York, 26 April 1993.

31. Cited in T.J.S.George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore* (London: André Deutsch, 1973), p. 170.

32. Sitton to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4047/19, 1 December 1967.

33. Author's interview with Hong.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Observer on Sunday*, 30 April 1967.

36. Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Donald Moor Press, 1971), p. 375.

37. George G.Thomson, 'Britain's Plan to Leave Asia: An Uncertain Future for Singapore', *Round Table*, Vol. 58, No. 230 (April 1968), p. 122.

38. Foreign Ministry to Lee Kuan Yew, ISA 4220/3, 14 January 1968.

39. Hadas to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4220/3, 2 September 1968.

40. Israel's trade with Singapore amounted to US\$3 million for the first nine months of 1967 and Israel bought about \$1million.

41. Such comparisons were already made prior to Singapore's secession from Malaysia. Thus for example, the Singaporean representative in the Malaysian Parliament, Sayed Ali Ridah Alsagoff, attacked the PAP government for employing Israeli youth guides and warned that a 'second Palestine' would be created in Singapore if the government did not do anything to prevent it. In the past, Alsagoff served as an honorary consul for Tunisia, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. He continued his intense anti-Israeli campaign in many ways, including writing letters to newspaper editors about the Arab boycott. Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, p. 108.

42. Buchanan, *Singapore in Southeast Asia*, p. 271.

43. Michael Hill and Lian Kwen Fee, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 205.

44. Embassy in Singapore to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4220/3, 26 January 1968.

45. Cited in George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore*, p. 171.

46. Gordon P.Means, *Malaysian Politics* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), p. 364.

47. Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival, 1965–1967* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 51.

48. *The Guardian*, 11 September 1962.

49. Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore*, pp. 45, 54; the comparison made by Goh Keng Swee seems to have had a powerful impact on his listeners. *The Asian*, 10 December 1972.
50. The Fixed Policy Objectives of Our Party: Policy Statement of the Central Executive Council of the PAP', *People's Action Party 6th Anniversary Souvenir, 1960* (Singapore: Petir Editorial Board, 1960), p. 5.
51. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connections*, p. 26.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Jerusalem Post*, 17 April 1974.
54. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 315–16.
55. *Jerusalem Post*, 28 January 1986.
56. Obaid Ul-Haq, 'Foreign Policy', in John S.T.Quah, Cheng Heng Chee and Seah Chee Meow (eds), *Government and Politics of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 299.
57. *Jerusalem Post*, 2 November 1978.
58. *Ibid.*, 6 May 1979.
59. Author's interview with Hong.
60. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 November 1981.
61. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1981.
62. H.S.Aynor, S.Avimor and N.Kaminer (eds), *The Role of the Israel Labour Movement in Establishing Relations with the States of Asia: Documents* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem: The Harry S Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 1989), pp. 66–8.
63. *Jerusalem Post*, 21 September 1982.
64. *Ibid.*, 14 September 1982.
65. Israeli exports dropped from US\$80 million in 1980 to US\$53 million in 1981 and to a mere US\$35 million in 1982. *Ibid.*, 29 June 1983.
66. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1984.
67. *Ibid.*, 7 November 1984.
68. *Ibid.*, 13 April 1986.
69. Chan Heng Chee, *A Sensation of Independence: A Political Biography of David Marshal* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 245.
70. Leon Comber, 'David Marshal and "Meet the People"—Singapore 1955–56', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (November 1994), p. 105.
71. *Jerusalem Post*, 31 December 1984.
72. Yakir Elkariiv, 'Israel's Exhibition in Singapore Air Show', *Israel Air Force Magazine*, No. 48 (November 1985), pp. 42–3 [Hebrew].
73. *Jerusalem Post*, 28 October 1985.
74. According to a report by the US State Department Israel had sent 11 American-designed helicopters to Rhodesia via Singapore. *Ibid.*, 7 January 1979.
75. *Ibid.*, 29 October 1985.
76. *Ibid.*, 8 November 1985.
77. This was partially because the Singaporean government thought that the Malaysian response would be mild. *The Straits Times*, 27 December 1986.
78. R.S.Milne and Diane K.Mauzy, *Singapore: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p. 168.

79. *Straits Times*, 15 December 1986.
80. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 November 1986.
81. *Straits Times*, 19 November 1986.
82. *Jerusalem Post*, 20 November 1986.
83. Michael Leifer, 'Israel's President in Singapore: Political Catalysis and Transnational Politics', *Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1988), p. 347.
84. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 1987.
85. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 November 1986.
86. Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 50.
87. Leifer, 'Israel's President in Singapore', pp. 343–4; 349–50; N.Ganesan, 'Islamic Responses within ASEAN to Singapore Foreign Policy', *Asian Thought and Society: An International Review*, Vol. 13, No. 38 (May 1988), p. 131.
88. *Jerusalem Post*, 23 November 1986.
89. *Ibid.*, 25 December 1986.
90. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1987.
91. Joyce Tan (ed.), *Singapore 1991* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1991), p. 64.
92. Ben-Gen (Res) Lee Hsien Loong, 'ASEAN's Pragmatic Approach in Science and Technology Cooperation', *Speeches* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1992), p. 104.
93. Lindsey Shanson, 'Singapore Sling', *Jerusalem Report*, 15 August 1991, p. 24.
94. Meron Medzini, *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents, 1992–1994*, Vol. 14 (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995), p. 619.
95. *Jerusalem Post*, 13 May 1994.
96. *Ha'aretz*, 13 May 1994.
97. *Ibid.*
98. Author's interview with Choshen.
99. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 14 July 2000.
100. There is little doubt that Singapore's special relations with Israel came at a considerable economic sacrifice. Statistics show that Singapore's trade with the Arab world amounted to US\$8.1 billion in 1998. This constituted only 3.6 per cent of Singapore's total trade valued at US\$221 billion. Arab trade with Singapore amounted to only 2.3 percent of US\$351 billion total trade. V.K.Rajan, 'Singapore's Arab Street', *Pharaos* (January 2000), p. 78.
101. *Jerusalem Post*, 21 May 1998.

8

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—Diplomacy in a Disputed Region

Relations with the countries of former French Indo-China presented a unique problem for the Israeli Foreign Ministry. This was largely due to the fact that this was the most disputed area in South-East Asia. The fact that the area was under French control until the mid-1950s ruled out direct contacts with any of the three states without the consent of the French government. By the mid-1950s, Israel was keen on consolidating its ties with France, its main source of arms and military equipment. The tension on the Israeli-Egyptian border prior to the Suez Affair underscored the importance of cordial relations with France and prevented Israel from becoming involved in that region. Moreover, Israel's commitments in Burma discouraged it from assuming responsibilities elsewhere in Asia and the chaos which followed the defeat of the French forces by the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 had a discouraging effect on Israel. As officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry saw it, involvement in an area that had turned into a Cold War battleground was liable to antagonize the superpowers. Israel's connection with the two Vietnamese states proved to be the most risky. Any Israeli attempt to approach South Vietnam was liable to incur the hostility of North Vietnam and China, as well as the Soviet Union, while ties with North Vietnam could jeopardize Israel's relations with the United States.

Israel's attempt to reach Cambodia proved to be less risky and more rewarding for both sides. President Nordom Sihanouk's neutralism and pragmatism proved to be highly beneficial for Israel until the mid-1970s. As long as he was not compelled to yield to communist pressure Sihanouk sought diplomatic ties and aid from as many countries as possible. Yet Sihanouk's pragmatism was also responsible for the subsequent tension in his country's relations with Israel. After entering into an alliance with the communist Khmer Rouge he proved more than willing to denounce Israel after many years of close cooperation. The fall of pro-Western Lon Nol's regime in 1975 and the rise of the Khmer Rouge as the ruling party in Kampuchea (Cambodia) under Pol Pot reduced the cooperation between the two countries ever further. Israel did not wish to be seen as a collaborator with a regime that proved to be one of the darkest in the region's history. A similar development occurred in Israeli-Laotian relations. Laos's inclination to remain neutral and its tendency to rely on US aid encouraged cooperation with Israel. Israel's relations with Laos remained cordial until 1975, when the country fell in the hands of the Pathet Lao under Kaysone Phomvihane who overthrew the monarchy and became Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Despite the relative importance of Cambodia and Laos, the dominant country in the region was Vietnam, which became united in May 1976 following the Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon. The change in Vietnam's attitude toward Israel did not occur

immediately after the war. Israel had to wait until the mid-1980s, when Vietnam's leaders sought to readjust their relations with their neighbors as well as with the superpowers. In December 1986, the Sixth Party Congress voted in favor of improving relations with China, the ASEAN countries, Japan and the West, and agreed to negotiate over Cambodia's fate. Indirectly, the door was gradually opened to normalization of relations with Israel. What made the normalization process even easier for Vietnam was the fact that the Middle East peace process got underway.

This chapter intends to show how Israel's relations with the countries of former French Indo-China were subject to the profound political and ideological changes that had taken place inside these countries and in their position in the world arena.

Unlike other Asian countries, Israel's relations with Vietnam presented a unique problem due to the country's division. In November 1949 France granted Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos the status of equal members of the French Union and called upon Israel to recognize them. Of all three, only Vietnam applied to Israel for recognition through France. Israel did not respond and probably missed an opportunity, which it later regretted.¹ Preoccupied with the countries of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, which had large Jewish populations whose emigration to Israel it sought to expedite, the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not give priority to South-East Asia. Moreover, Israel's general tendency to give priority to its ties with Europe slowed down the normalization process. In 1954 the Israeli government decided not to recognize either of the two countries in order to avoid unnecessary complications and expenses. The refusal to grant recognition at that time made political sense since Israel had no desire to be identified as taking sides in the Cold War. In addition, the fact that the South Vietnamese regime seemed weak and liable to fall into communist hands had strongly discouraged the Israelis.²

When France sent Israel a telegram announcing the establishment of the Vietnamese republics in 1954, Israel did not respond. And when approached by South Vietnamese officials regarding that issue the Israeli government insisted that any recognition, *de facto* or *de jure*, was contingent upon diplomatic relations between the two countries. In August 1960, Golda Meir expressed willingness to recognize South Vietnam *de jure* on the proviso that diplomatic relations be established between the two countries. Unwilling to alienate the communist and neutralist regimes in Asia, the Israelis made it absolutely clear that granting recognition to South Vietnam must not be interpreted as supporting its claim to North Vietnam.

A South Vietnamese Legation was established in Israel in the autumn of 1955.³ By 1957, there were encouraging signs that South Vietnam was gaining strength politically and economically. Over 40 countries, including the United States, Great Britain, the Commonwealth countries, Western Europe and some Asian and Latin American countries recognized the South Vietnamese regime. The South Vietnamese regime was far more stable than it appeared at first and its economy seemed robust, and what was more important from Israel's viewpoint was that its Foreign Ministry officials began receiving clear signs that Saigon was interested in relations with Israel. In a conversation with Dan Avni in June 1957, Buu Kinh, a counselor in the South Vietnamese Embassy in Paris asked whether Israel would be willing to recognize his country. That Avni could not provide a straight answer was largely due to the fact that there were still hesitations in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, whose officials feared that recognition of the South Vietnamese

regime might have an adverse effect on Israel's relations with Ceylon. There was also fear that if the issue came up in a Knesset debate many members would oppose such a move. Moreover, Israel did not wish to become entangled in issues involving legal difficulties pertaining to sovereignty and territorial disputes.⁴ Therefore, when the issue came under review again in August that year, Israel's decision remained negative.

In May 1958, South Vietnam's newly appointed Charge d'Affaires to Bonn, Ha Vinn Phuong, told an Israeli Foreign Ministry official that in view of rise of Pan-Arabism and the union between Egypt and Syria (UAR), it would be in Israel's interest to develop strong ties with South Vietnam.⁵ In August 1958, Israel's Minister of Commerce and Industry Pinhas Sapir met Vietnam's Consul General Tran Van Dinh in Rangoon. Questions regarding commercial relations and joint projects between Israel and South Vietnam were discussed. By the end of that year, South Vietnam hosted Israeli economists and financial advisers. Shortly afterwards, it requested Israel's support for its candidature to UNESCO and asked that a good will delegation be invited to Israel. The Israelis complied with the request and extended an invitation to a delegation of eight technical South Vietnamese experts.

On 25 January 1959, the Israeli government accepted the Foreign Ministry's recommendation and decided to establish consular relations with South Vietnam. In March 1959, President Ngo Dinh Diem invited Israel's Ambassador to Rangoon, Daniel Lewin, to visit Saigon. Both sides were interested in a formal pact but since the text prepared did not conform to the points agreed upon earlier the pact was not signed. However, the South Vietnamese demonstrated a practical approach in this matter. They did not seem overly concerned about the lack of formal agreement and remained satisfied with practical relations on the consular level.

In June 1959, Diem sent a representative to Rangoon to ask Israeli officials to assess the effectiveness of his army and to explore the possibility of sending IDF experts in order to train his officers or to enable them to be trained in Israel.⁶ In August of that year, the Israeli Foreign Ministry adopted a decision to grant de jure recognition to South Vietnam with the proviso that its recognition did not constitute support of Saigon's claim to be the sole legitimate Vietnamese regime.⁷ In the autumn of 1959, Ben Horin visited Saigon, where he met Diem and Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau. Ben Horin reported the results of his visit on his return. This report shed light on Saigon's motives and its decision not to establish diplomatic relations with Israel at that time. It read in part:

Vietnam thinks well of us and if not for serious political reasons, would surely establish diplomatic relations with us. The reasons are: Vietnam's conviction that she needs all the internal support she can get in her struggle against communist North Vietnam. For this, she has to weigh the source of maximum votes: Israel's one voice vs. all the Arab and pro-Arab votes. Strong group within [the] National Assembly [is] against relations with Israel. Vietnam is interested in, perhaps even anxious for, practical contacts, technical training, aid in settlement, defence, etc. We should encourage exchange of visits and information and offer aid.⁸

At the beginning of 1960, an Egyptian delegation under Mahmoud Badawi El-Shiati

arrived in Saigon. According to sources in the Israeli Foreign Ministry the purpose of this visit was merely to spread propaganda that would keep South Vietnam and Israel apart.⁹ South Vietnam seemed to be warming to the Arab countries. In the autumn of that year it extended an invitation to Iraq's representatives to participate in its national holiday celebrations.¹⁰ When Buu Kinh discussed Ben Horin's visit with other Israeli officials in Paris he explained that his government was well aware of the fact that no benefit could be expected from the Arabs. He said, however, that his government was determined to prevent the establishment of diplomatic relations between North Vietnam and the Arab states, the UAR in particular. In that conversation he revealed that his country had suggested diplomatic relations to the UAR but had been rebuffed. The Egyptians, he said, insisted that they were neutral in the conflict between Saigon and Hanoi. They advised him to follow North Vietnam's example by sending an economic delegation to Cairo. The South Vietnamese diplomat said that his country declined the offer. However, he added apologetically that since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the UAR was still on his government's agenda those with Israel had to be ruled out.¹¹

In February 1961, Kidron visited Saigon in order to participate in the Mekong Conference. The UAR Ambassador to Cambodia was present in the meeting. Consequently, the South Vietnamese representative avoided discussing diplomatic relations with his Israeli counterpart. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials regarded the Ambassador's visit as a deliberate attempt by the UAR to undermine rapprochement between Israel and South Vietnam.¹²

When Israeli journalists visited Saigon in April 1961, Diem said that diplomatic relations with Israel were still under consideration and that he should not be faulted for their absence.¹³ He later explained that his government sought to avoid diplomatic complications as long as the war against the Vietcong lasted. Moreover, he argued that diplomatic relations with Israel could provoke the Arabs and the Third World countries against South Vietnam.¹⁴ Yet despite the lack of diplomatic relations, contacts between the two countries continued. Tahal experts were sent to Vietnam to advise the Vietnamese on proper usage of water for their agricultural projects, and the cultural exchanges continued as well. In the summer of that year three South Vietnamese delegates participated in the International Federation of Teachers Association Conference in Tel Aviv. In his conversation with an Israeli Foreign Ministry official in August of that year Tran Van Dinh, a minister at the South Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, revealed that Diem's attempt to convince the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee to agree to diplomatic relations with Israel failed due to its members' fear of Arab rapprochement with North Vietnam.¹⁵

The absence of diplomatic relations did not prevent the two countries from intensifying their economic cooperation, and Israel continued to regard South Vietnam as a valuable trading partner. In December 1961, Israeli officials suggested that a most-favored-nation agreement regarding customs payment be signed between the two countries. When Herzog visited Saigon in February 1962, Diem expressed his eagerness to continue benefiting from Israeli expertise and reassured his guest that the issue of diplomatic relations with Israel had not been dropped from his government's agenda.¹⁶ In March of that year, South Vietnam agreed at last to sign the most-favored-nation agreement. However, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed resentment over Saigon's

refusal to establish diplomatic relations. In response, a South Vietnamese official, Pham Dang Lam, argued that while several Israeli representatives came to Saigon to discuss diplomatic relations they never made serious attempts to finalize the negotiations. The South Vietnamese government concluded that Israel was not really interested in diplomatic relations and remained convinced that all these talks were merely feelers.¹⁷

In the autumn of 1961, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry assessed the situation in South Vietnam and arrived at the conclusion that the country's difficulties were mounting and that there were signs that Saigon was anxious to renew contacts with Israel with a view to establishing diplomatic relations.¹⁸ After talks which Israeli diplomats held with South Vietnam's Ambassador in Bangkok, Cao Thai Baos, at the beginning of 1962, in which they reassured him of Israel's seriousness about this matter, Saigon agreed in principle to establish diplomatic relations but made no firm commitment. Diem took the opportunity to exchange letters with Ben Gurion in which he stated that his country was in dire need of international moral support.¹⁹ Ben Gurion replied favorably to Saigon's request for moral support and technical assistance.²⁰ The discussions regarding the possibility of sending technical aid to South Vietnam had become much more concrete. South Vietnam expressed interest in building security villages modeled after the kibbutzim and Israel agreed to send experts to help in this project.²¹ Moreover, South Vietnam expressed interest in purchasing Israeli-made munitions, which received a negative response from Jerusalem.²² Officials in Jerusalem proceeded with the sales when it became clear that Washington did not object.²³ The official review of South Vietnam's foreign policy sent to the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Bangkok stated that Vietnam maintained 'the most satisfactory relations with Israel'.²⁴ This gave Israel an advantage over Egypt, which at that time had only consular relations with South Vietnam.

In the early 1960s the Israelis made consistent efforts to establish diplomatic relations with South Vietnam but Saigon did not respond due to fear of Arab reaction. Saigon's position regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations did not change until the middle of the decade. In January 1966, the Vietnamese Ambassador asked his Israeli counterpart in Bangkok if Israel would be interested in establishing diplomatic relations and an exchange of ambassadors. By then, however, the Israelis had changed their minds and did not respond.²⁵ US involvement in South Vietnam and the fear that Israel would be identified as Washington's collaborator in the war against North Vietnam prevailed in the Foreign Ministry. Moreover, the Israelis were displeased with Saigon's attempts to expand its contacts with the Arab states.

All along the United States was encouraging the Israelis to establish diplomatic relations with Saigon.²⁶ However, seeking to ward off criticism by communist and Third World countries, Israel tended to ignore Washington's pressure in that direction.²⁷ According to Dean Rusk, Washington started by urging the South Vietnamese to adopt a reserved attitude toward Israel in order to gain Arab support. However, when the Arab states remained cool Washington began urging Saigon to exchange diplomats with Israel. As it turned out, the Israelis chose to bide their time despite the fact that they had an agreement according to which the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok would be in charge of South Vietnamese affairs while the South Vietnamese Ambassador would be in charge of Israeli affairs.

The question whether or not to establish diplomatic relations with South Vietnam caused much controversy in Israel. The proponents argued that this was a unique opportunity for Israel to cooperate with the United States in an important area and that granting recognition to South Vietnam would earn Israel handsome dividends in Washington. The opponents argued that diplomatic relations with Saigon would portray Israel as an enemy of the nonaligned countries that opposed US policies in Asia. Particularly concerned about such reaction were the left-wing parties Mapam and the Communists. Indeed, some of these countries were already hostile to Israel and openly championed the rights of the Palestinians to return to their homeland. According to Rusk, Washington informed Israel about the anti-Israeli content of the pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian messages which emanated from Hanoi. Evidently, officials in Washington hoped that by making the Israelis aware of Hanoi's hostility they would be able to convince them to establish diplomatic relations with South Vietnam. However, the Israelis remained unmoved and the United States refrained from pressuring Saigon to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.²⁸

In the summer of 1966 Dayan visited Vietnam. Israeli officials thought it prudent to emphasize that he was not an official representative of the Israeli government.²⁹ The Israeli Foreign Ministry was concerned that the visit would be interpreted as willingness on Israel's part to assist the US war effort in Vietnam.³⁰ The episode did not have any adverse effect on Israel's relations with Hanoi but the two countries remained distant. At the same time, officials in Saigon expressed a willingness to recognize Israel and to establish diplomatic relations without delay. However, they said that as a result of a manpower shortage they would like their representative in Rome to be in charge of Israeli affairs.³¹

Israel's relations with South Vietnam could not be pursued without taking US interests into consideration. Nor was it easy to ignore the French government's appeal to refrain from establishing ties with Saigon on the grounds that such a step might have a negative effect on French public opinion.³² Indeed, the Israelis were concerned that such a step would alienate the French public. Eytan warned his colleagues in the Foreign Ministry that establishing relations with Saigon could have dire consequences in Europe and would create a 'catastrophic impression' in France.³³ Moreover, the Israeli government faced domestic opposition. The left-wing parties continued to express reservations about relations with Saigon. The Communist Party argued that assistance to Saigon would have an adverse effect on Israel's national interests and on its ties with all socialist countries struggling to become free from the yoke of colonialism.³⁴ Above all, however, it was the militaristic nature of the South Vietnamese regime which deterred the Israelis. When the elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in South Vietnam in the autumn of 1966, Eban told the press that Israel had to reassess its policy toward Saigon.³⁵

The Constituent Assembly voted in during those elections agreed to draft a constitution and thus pave the way for the restoration of a civilian government. Undoubtedly, the election process was marred by problems and was by no means free from corruption. Many Vietnamese criticized the elections saying that they were rigged by strongmen who sought to come to power and to deny the Vietnamese freedom. For example, the Head of the Unified Buddhist Church rejected the elections as being a tactic designed to enable Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky 'to form a dictatorial regime to serve foreign interests'

and urged his followers to refrain from voting. Moreover, the Vietcong made attempts to disrupt the election process. Nevertheless, the democratic process was not interrupted. According to government officials 80.8 percent of the 5,289,652 registered voters had cast ballots. About 2.5 million citizens who lived in Vietcong-controlled areas did not vote. A newly elected Assembly of 117 members was voted in, and proceeded to introduce new measures that left most powers in the hands of the executive.³⁶ However, despite the fact that the government was elected by a democratic procedure many Vietnamese condemned the regime and sought scapegoats. Consequently, Israel could no longer maintain contacts with South Vietnam without having to face criticism from those who argued that it should not be dealing with military juntas. What made the criticism particularly harmful was the fact that Israel provided military assistance to South Vietnam. Israeli sources found it necessary to deny reports that their government had agreed to assist the South Vietnamese regime in establishing military settlements along Vietnam's border, arguing that they were aware of the fact that such commitment could lead to unnecessary complications for Israel.³⁷ On December 1972, Israel yielded to US pressure and established full diplomatic relation with South Vietnam which lasted until the fall of Saigon in April 1975. Shortly prior to the fall of Saigon, President Nguyen Van Thieu sent General Tran Van Don on a mission to Israel in order to study how armed kibbutzim produced food. The concept seemed attractive to the President but it was impractical for South Vietnam.³⁸

While Israel's relations with South Vietnam were gradually warming up, North Vietnam preferred to remain distant. A review of the documents in the Israeli State Archives reveals that Israel did not overlook the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with North Vietnam prior to US involvement there. Initially, Ho Chi Minh was sympathetic to the Zionist cause and to the Jewish struggle against the British, whom he regarded as imperialists. In his meeting with Ben Gurion in Paris in 1946, Ho Chi Minh proposed that an Israeli government in exile be established in Hanoi.³⁹ However, the issue of diplomatic relations with North Vietnam was not seriously discussed among Israeli Foreign Ministry officials until the early 1960s. In July 1963, Eytan wrote to Shimoni, 'From what I hear here, we should see North Vietnam as the real emerging vibrant force in the entire area called "Indo-China". They are talking about wonderful progress in industry and other areas. Did we establish any link with that country or its representatives wherever they are? It seems to me that we ought to think about it.'⁴⁰

Given the fact that North Vietnam was already regarded in Washington's eyes as a member of the communist camp no publicity was given to these talks. Besides, Israeli officials were concerned that such an initiative could endanger Israel's relations with South Vietnam. Unwilling to jeopardize its links with Saigon, Israel did not wish to extend recognition to North Vietnam despite the fact that Eytan believed that Israel should have followed Egypt's example by recognizing both Koreas and both Vietnams.⁴¹ The war in Vietnam increased US involvement there and decreased the prospects of normalization between Israel and North Vietnam. At the same time, Hanoi began strengthening its ties with the Arab states, which supported its struggle against South Vietnam and the United States. On 10 August 1964, the Egyptian National Council for Peace issued a communiqué, which read as follows:

This imperialist aggression on North Vietnam is an act of political and military piracy, committed in defiance to international organizations, and is aimed at terrorizing small nations, and imposing political, economic and social conditions; it constitutes a grave and direct menace to world peace, and an assault on all people and a threat to the causes of the struggle for liberty and peace. All the just movements for liberty, sovereignty and social development for which people are struggling, shall suffer a fatal blow if the aggression on North Vietnam is not confronted by a common effort from all peoples, by an energetic denunciation, and by adoption of measures preventing its repetition.⁴²

On 4 March 1965, North Vietnam and Egypt decided to raise their diplomatic relations to embassy level.⁴³ North Vietnam's rapprochement with the Arab states had increased its distance from Israel, and together they joined hands in condemning both Israel and South Vietnam, depicting both as instruments of American imperialism that sought to dominate the free people of the Third World. Naturally, Israel could not hope to establish diplomatic relations with a country that regarded it as a puppet of American imperialism. Seeking to escape the blame of complicity in a Western-orchestrated attempt to dominate the world, Golda Meir resisted President Lyndon Johnson's attempt to involve Israel in Vietnam.⁴⁴ There were numerous explicit requests from Washington in 1965 and 1966, that Israel extend diplomatic recognition to South Vietnam and provide civilian aid to the Saigon regime, but it was only in the summer of 1966 that Israel finally agreed to accept eight South Vietnamese farming trainees, on the proviso that the matter remained secret.⁴⁵

Hanoi seemed pleased with Israel's reluctance to join the United States in the Vietnam War and was encouraged by the fact that no diplomatic ties were established between Jerusalem and Saigon. A representative of North Vietnam who met Uri Avneri, the editor of the radical and controversial *Ha'olam Hazeh* magazine, expressed his satisfaction that American Jewry opposed the war in Vietnam and that Israel turned down Saigon's offer to establish diplomatic relations.⁴⁶ Despite its official neutral stand Israel did not wish to abandon the idea of establishing some contact with Hanoi through persistent and low-profile efforts. Attempts to approach Hanoi were made through some of Israel's foreign embassies in places such as Guinea.⁴⁷ In addition, the Israelis sought to use the contacts which the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett had in Hanoi in the hope that he would inform the North Vietnamese of Israel's contribution to the countries of the Third World.⁴⁸

When asked by David Schonburn why his government persisted in its hostile attitude toward Israel, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister answered that it greatly admired Israel but given its predicament his government was in no position to establish a dialogue.⁴⁹ From Hanoi's viewpoint, relations with Israel were liable to tarnish its image as an ally of all revolutionary movements that struggled against imperialist regimes. The association between imperialism and Zionism that loomed so large in the propaganda campaign of North Vietnam could not be abandoned overnight. Hanoi found it beneficial to continue promoting its image as the champion of all downtrodden people and revolutionary movements throughout the world. Therefore, it called for better relations with the Palestinians. A message sent from the Vietcong to the PLO condemned Israel and the United States as imperialists and expressed support for the aspirations of the

Palestinian people.⁵⁰ In addition, Hanoi sought to expand its ties with Syria. In the spring of 1967, Vietcong representatives came to Syria to discuss the possibility of coordinating terrorist activities against Israel.⁵¹ Reacting to the visit, Prime Minister Eshkol stated that the Vietcong's presence in Syria was worrisome. Moreover, Israeli officials were concerned that the Vietcong were training Palestinians in acts of terror against Israel.⁵² Arab defeat in the Six Day War intensified Hanoi's hostility toward Israel, and officials in Hanoi argued that a just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict was contingent upon Israeli withdrawal from all Arab land and the restoration of Palestinian rights. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that all Israeli attempts to approach North Vietnamese officials were fruitless. By the end of 1968, the prevailing opinion in the Israeli Foreign Ministry was that it was useless to approach North Vietnam because such efforts had no prospect of success.⁵³ In a meeting with an Israeli official the Minister of Culture in Hanoi's government said, 'We have nothing against the Jews or the State of Israel. We are in favor of the rights of all countries and those of the Middle East, including Israel, to political sovereignty, in favor of their right to live in peace and cooperation. I hope that this region would blossom in peace.' The Israeli official reminded his host that Israel refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with Saigon despite pressure from the United States.

Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry attributed Hanoi's reluctance to normalize relations to a successful campaign carried out by Arab diplomats. Israeli officials who tried to establish contacts with their North Vietnamese counterparts reported to the Foreign Ministry that Arab diplomats were quite active in North Vietnam.⁵⁴ An Israeli official who met North Vietnamese representatives in Cambodia in December 1968 reported that they were not particularly friendly.⁵⁵ When asked about his country's attitude toward Israel one of the leaders of the Vietnamese Agency of Information, Le Chon, who came from Hanoi to Paris for talks with US representatives, said, 'We are socialists and revolutionaries. We are therefore neutral. But above all: those who are being supported by the United States are our enemies. This is why we are in favor with the Arabs.'⁵⁶ Israeli diplomats who met their North Vietnamese counterparts argued that they were influenced by the position of China and the Soviet Union regarding the Middle East. They also argued that the North Vietnamese were occupied with problems relating to the war in Vietnam and therefore were not free to dwell on distant problems.⁵⁷

The years of Israeli involvement in that region did not bring significant changes. The victorious North Vietnamese who took control of South Vietnam and established a united state remained distant from Israel and championed the cause of the Palestinian people. On 12 February 1981, Vietnamese representatives met Arafat and offered to sell him missiles.⁵⁸ Hanoi's hostility toward the United States and Israel continued long after the fall of Saigon and the withdrawal of US forces from that country. It was only following the fall of the Soviet Union, when communism became discredited and the states in the region sought to rehabilitate their economies by introducing a certain measure of *laissez faire* that contacts between Israel and Vietnam began.

After Israel and China improved their relations Vietnam became more receptive to Israeli friendship. An economic agreement was signed between the two countries in 1990, although the contacts remained limited to economic and commercial fields. In an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, Le Dan Duan, the senior economic adviser to the

secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, said that despite the absence of diplomatic relations the two countries could coordinate their trade through third-party arrangements.⁵⁹ According to a report broadcast by the Voice of Israel, an Israeli diplomat went on a visit to Vietnam in January 1992 and met government officials. This visit was the first of its kind and it was termed 'private'.⁶⁰ However, Foreign Ministry sources denied that any breakthrough in Israeli-Vietnamese relations had taken place. Officials in Jerusalem said that Hanoi did not show any signs that it was willing to start a dialogue with Israel. They added, however, that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and India could have a positive influence on the development of the bilateral relations and that rapprochement between the two countries should not be ruled out. The same sources revealed that Vietnamese representatives had been maintaining secret contacts with their Israeli counterparts and that Vietnam received an unofficial trade delegation from Israel sometime during the second half of 1992. Despite Israel's good will, however, these sources stated emphatically that in view of the lingering US-Vietnamese hostility and Washington's struggle to repatriate missing soldiers, Israel was compelled to consider the US position before deciding on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam.⁶¹

The contacts between the two countries continued and in March 1993 a delegation of the Israeli Foreign Ministry led by its Director General Joseph Hadas paid a visit to Vietnam to discuss cooperation between the two countries in the economic, medical, educational, commercial and investment fields. The delegation visited former President Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum and met other Vietnamese dignitaries.⁶² The main results of this visit, however, were the unprecedented memoranda of understanding signed, one between the two Foreign Ministers, and the other between the Chambers of Commerce. The trade memorandum stated that in anticipation of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries the two sides would take steps to expand economic and trade cooperation. They also discussed the possibility of opening an Israeli Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister told Hadas that he was confident that full diplomatic relations would soon be established between the two countries. He also stated that he would like to visit Israel, at which Hadas promptly invited his interlocutor to come. The Israeli delegation included other key figures such as Oded Eran, the Foreign Ministry Deputy Director General in charge of the Economic Division; Ehud Gol, the Director of the International Cooperation Division; and David Matna'i, Director of the Africa, Asia and Oceania Division. It was agreed that a Vietnamese delegation would reciprocate by visiting Israel within six months. Both sides decided to nominate appropriate bodies in order to identify areas of possible cooperation and Israel agreed to provide Vietnam with technical know-how and training in areas such as agriculture, telecommunication and medicine, particularly AIDS detection.⁶³

Prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry deemed it proper to inform the United States. On 12 May 1993, Beilin left for Washington in order to coordinate Jerusalem's moves with officials there.⁶⁴ Hanoi was no less sensitive to the reaction of its allies. To allay Arab fears that its rapprochement with Israel would have an adverse effect on its Middle East policy, Vietnam quickly reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian cause. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Ho The Lan said:

Vietnam reaffirms its recognition of the state of Palestine and its desire to develop friendly relations and lasting cooperation between Vietnam and Palestine. Vietnam reiterates its support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian state. As agreed, this [Israeli] visit mainly dealt with economic and trade relations.⁶⁵

On 12 July 1993, only a few months after Hanoi made this statement of sympathy with the Palestinian people, the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced that full diplomatic relations between the two countries had been established.⁶⁶ Peres received an official invitation to Hanoi. Vietnamese officials stated that since their country was undergoing a transition from socialism to a market economy they would like to benefit from Israeli technical experience. In addition, they stated that the progress in the Middle East peace process prompted them to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.⁶⁷ Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien did not hide the fact that the decision was a result of his country's wish to improve its relations with the United States.⁶⁸ The news astonished many Israelis. The correspondent of *Yediot Aharonot* wrote:

Vietnam is smiling toward us, and through us—towards Bill Clinton who is about to decide on September 14, whether or not to renew the economic embargo imposed by the US after her defeat in the Vietnam War. Vietnam defeated the Americans on the battle for the stomach of the Vietnamese, and like in all regimes which survived the Communist era, there is a strong conviction in Hanoi that the Jews are pulling the strings in Washington, and that Israel is a country of *shtadlanim* [individuals with remarkable clout who act on behalf of their people]... Officials in Jerusalem say—Vietnam is unlike Libya, Iran or North Korea. The Americans have no reservations about the love affair between us, and it seems that the road from Hanoi and back goes through Jerusalem.⁶⁹

The main value of the newly established diplomatic relations was that they expanded the economic cooperation between the two countries. Three economic agreements were signed in January 1996. The Israel Koor Industries for telecommunication and defense electronics began investing in Vietnamese companies on a large scale and on 18 March 1997, a Vietnamese delegation visited Israel to promote cooperation in the technical and scientific field and boost the bilateral trade.⁷⁰

Israel's relations with Cambodia and Laos followed a more predictable pattern than its relations with Vietnam. This was particularly the case in Cambodia where Israeli involvement was far more intense than in Vietnam. In order to understand the road to the Israeli-Cambodian rapprochement it is necessary to trace the relations between the two countries from the beginning.

On 13 February 1955, the Israeli government decided to recognize Cambodia and Laos.⁷¹ The Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok was charged with Israeli affairs in Laos. What made it possible for Israel to embark on an attempt to befriend these countries was Washington's attitude in this matter—it did not discourage Israel from approaching

Cambodia and Laos. On the contrary, State Department officials hinted that it would be desirable for Israel and other free countries to reinforce their presence in Laos, whether by establishing a resident representation or by frequent visits of non-resident representatives.⁷² Through its embassy in Laos, the United States requested that Israel send experts to assist the Laotian government.⁷³ However, the Israelis were already involved in Burma where they had made commitments which far exceeded their ability to deliver. Wishing to avoid commitments that they might not be able to fulfill, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials hesitated.⁷⁴ Shimoni wrote to the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok that the turmoil in Laos was such that sending experts could be a complicated matter, particularly since all issues pertaining to development were under the purview of a communist official.⁷⁵

Israel's relations with Cambodia underwent significant changes when Sihanouk came to power in 1955. Israel's late recognition was largely due to the fact that the Foreign Ministry dealt with Cambodia in the context of its relations with France. This becomes obvious when one examines a recommendation sent by Maurice Fischer, the Israeli Minister in Paris to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem asking it 'not to act in haste' in matters regarding the recognition of the three states of Indo-China, as demanded by France.⁷⁶

It was the Bandung Conference that forced upon the Israeli government a reassessment of its foreign policy. Hoping to be invited to the conference, Israel officially declared its willingness to adhere to nonalignment and announced its decision to recognize Laos and Cambodia.⁷⁷ As it turned out, however, Israel was not invited to attend the conference. The outcome of this episode was that rapprochement with the Asian nations began to assume a higher priority on Israel's national agenda and Cambodia began to loom larger in the eyes of Israeli foreign-policy-makers. Sympathetic comments written by Sihanouk during the Sinai Campaign of 1956 encouraged the Israelis to approach Cambodia,⁷⁸ and Sharett and Shimoni were the first Israeli diplomats to visit there in the same year. In his letter to Foreign Minister Prince Sirik Matak, Sharett expressed Israel's wish to establish diplomatic relations with Cambodia. He asked the Cambodian Foreign Minister to give his consent to Shimoni's nomination as Israel's representative in Phnom Penh and suggested that the Cambodian government establish a diplomatic mission in Israel and that both countries cooperate politically and economically.⁷⁹ However, the Cambodian government did not act as quickly as the Israelis had hoped and the matter was postponed when a new regime came to power in Cambodia.⁸⁰ The regime, which came to power in the elections of September 1955, was a political apparatus controlled by the Sangkum Party that was established by Sihanouk and included mostly right-wing parties whose members were anti-communist. Sihanouk's party had decisively defeated the Democrats, the Khmer Independent Party of Son Ngoc Thanh and the left-wing Pracheacon Party, winning 83 percent of all seats in the National Assembly. The new regime's conservative and anti-communist orientation was pro-Western and there was little wonder that it agreed to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Cambodia's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel came as a severe diplomatic shock to the UAR, whose efforts to extend its influence in South-East Asia were dealt a major blow. Reacting to Cambodia's decision, a UAR minister was reported to have been very upset by it, saying that if his government had known that the

Cambodians were about to establish diplomatic relations with Israel it would never have sent him to Phnom Penh.⁸¹

During her visit to Phnom Penh in 1962, Sihanouk told Golda Meir that Cambodia followed the efforts of the Israeli pioneers with great admiration and that he was convinced that his country had much to learn from Israel.⁸² He asked for technical assistance and the Israelis responded willingly. Tahal began building an irrigation system and the Agridev Company established agricultural farms. At the same time, Cambodian students began flocking to Israeli universities and technical schools. The bilateral relations warmed up further in 1967, when Eban visited Phnom Penh and an Israeli Embassy was opened there.

Israeli-Cambodian relations remained cordial until the Six Day War when Sihanouk decided to adopt a pro-Arab policy. The official line of the Cambodian government, which appeared in the press when the war erupted, was clearly pro-Arab. The Phnom Penh daily *La Nouvelle Dépêche* expressed friendship with the Arabs and solidarity with their struggle against the imperialist powers.⁸³ By the end of the decade, Cambodia's policy had tilted even further toward the Arabs. Radio Phnom Penh had often denounced Israel's occupation of Arab land and Cambodia's representatives in the United Nations had constantly voted against Israel. In addition, press editorials spoke frequently in favor of the Palestinian cause. Yet Sihanouk never went to the extent of severing his country's ties with Israel. Although the official pronouncements of the Cambodian government were clearly pro-Arab he did not seem willing to adopt an anti-Israeli stand. In his private talks with Israelis whom he met he expressed sympathy with the Zionist enterprise. This was largely because the Israelis responded with alacrity to his country's need for technical assistance. Furthermore, Sihanouk admired the Jewish state and often spoke about its valiant people whose admirable achievements served as an inspiration to other nations. Sihanouk stated on several occasions that his country had much more in common with Israel than with any of the Arab states.⁸⁴

As in the case of Laos, the US attitude was an encouraging factor. Israel's activities in Cambodia were regarded favorably in Washington. In his meeting with Mike Forrestal of the President's office, Shimoni was told that Washington unreservedly approved all Israeli activities in Cambodia and would like these to intensify if possible.⁸⁵ During the period between 1965 and 1970 Israel participated in the establishment of an agricultural experimental station in the Prek Thnot region of Cambodia. Tahal's experts were sent to develop the water resources in the area and a geochemical laboratory was built in Cambodia.⁸⁶

Despite mounting pressure from the Arab world and from the Palestinians following the Six Day War, Sihanouk continued to believe that his country had much in common with Israel and showed no desire to sever the contacts. He thought that both countries were small, vulnerable and surrounded by powerful enemies. Each had a glorious past and was forced to survive with meager resources. He had a basic disdain for the great powers, which he regarded as exploiters suppressing small nations struggling for their survival,⁸⁷ an outlook which partially explains his friendly attitude toward Israel. Although his policy changed after the Six Day War he maintained diplomatic relations with Israel and turned a deaf ear to Egyptian protests when the Israeli Embassy opened in Phnom Penh in 1967.

The Israelis needed to exercise extreme caution in view of the fact that Cambodia had a conflict with Thailand. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok warned that any attempt on Israel's part to identify with Cambodia's position would undoubtedly lead to a strong reaction from Thailand.⁸⁸ The issue became extremely delicate when Sihanouk pressured Israel to recognize Cambodia's boundaries with complete disregard to Israel's need to maintain normal relations with Thailand. What made the issue more difficult from Israel's viewpoint was that Egypt had already decided to recognize Cambodia's borders.⁸⁹ Realizing the importance of maintaining cordial relations with Cambodia the Israelis complied. Fortunately, no major crisis in Israeli-Thai relations occurred as a result. The Israelis were willing to grant Sihanouk the recognition he asked for but not without a quid pro quo; Israel would recognize Cambodia's borders on the proviso that Cambodia refrain from supporting the Yugoslavian-sponsored resolution which demanded an immediate Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories.⁹⁰ However, Cambodia's position remained firm. Foreign Minister S.A.Phurissara explained that his country could not remain neutral because that would contradict Cambodia's resolve to pursue an active foreign policy. Besides, he explained that his country had to insist on Israeli withdrawal out of fear that such a principle might constitute a precedent in its conflict with Thailand.⁹¹ Phurissara rejected the link made by Israel, saying that Tel Aviv should realize that although Cambodia had considerable respect for the Israeli people it could not renege on its basic principles.⁹² Cambodia's vote in favor of the Yugoslavian-sponsored resolution was received with much disappointment in Jerusalem.⁹³ Phurissara explicitly said that Israel was the aggressor in the Arab-Israeli conflict and insisted on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.⁹⁴ Although Israel recognized Cambodia's borders, Phnom Penh did not change its pro-Arab policy and even considered severing its ties with Israel. All expressions of good will toward Israel remained low-key.⁹⁵

That the Sihanouk regime voted in the United Nations against Israel on most occasions was largely because Cambodia regarded itself as neutral country belonging to the Afro-Asian bloc. Cambodia voted against Israel in a resolution sponsored jointly by India and Yugoslavia, which demanded that Israel withdraw unconditionally from all Arab territories occupied during the Six Day War. This was largely a result of the Cambodian government's predicament at that time. Above all, it feared that a vote against a resolution drafted by nonaligned nations was liable to have serious repercussions, particularly if it set a precedent for the occupation of land by force. Given the fact that Cambodia had to deal with Vietnam's claims to its northern territory it is possible to understand why its representative supported a resolution regarded by Israel as most infamous. Not only was Cambodia in the process of seeking legitimacy for its borders, it also sought to promote good will with China and the Soviet Union, its giant neighbors in the north. Seen from Phnom Penh's point of view, friendship with Israel was not worth sacrificing its vital interests in South-East Asia. Despite the benefits that it derived from Israel, the imperatives of the moment demanded that greater attention be paid to areas closer to home.⁹⁶ That the Cambodian government did not see Israel as the sole culprit in the Arab-Israeli conflict and that its vote in favor of the anti-Israeli resolution was determined by factors other than its reaction to Israel's aggression is evident from comments made by Cambodian journalists. For instance, the semi-official newspaper

Realités Cambodiennes argued that Israel had aspirations for peace but was threatened by its surrounding Arab neighbors and that it did not refuse to withdraw from Arab land but made such withdrawal contingent upon face-to-face negotiations with the Arab states.⁹⁷ Cambodia's behavior can also be explained in part as being an outcome of its Francophile attitude. From Phnom Penh's point of view, the anti-Israeli attitude of the French regime after the Six Day War was a factor to be reckoned with. This was particularly the case since France joined the 17 nonaligned nations which voted for the radical draft.⁹⁸

That Israel's relations with Cambodia survived against all odds was in large measure due to the continued success of Israeli enterprise there. Israel's technical assistance to Cambodia between the years 1965 and 1975 was quite impressive. In addition to its involvement in the Prek Thnot project, Israel sent over 50 experts to Cambodia. They helped establish model farms and found ways to improve the quality of the rice crop. In addition, Cambodian students were sent to Israeli schools and medical supplies were shipped on a regular basis. Shimon Avimor, who served as the Israeli representative in Cambodia, told the author that although Israel had altruistic intentions, Foreign Ministry officials hoped to reap political benefit from their action in Cambodia. The results, he said, were quite disappointing when one considers the fact that after 1973 Cambodia's policy became more pro-Arab despite Israel's efforts.⁹⁹

The friendship between the two countries lasted until Sihanouk was deposed in 1970 and entered into an alliance with the communist Khmer Rouge. This alliance allowed him to remain the head of the Communist Government in Exile, Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale de Kampuchea (GRUNK), but in order to maintain his position he had to change his attitude toward Israel. Sihanouk proved to be a compliant student of his new communist mentors—he condemned Zionism frequently and recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians. Moreover, he publicly announced that the PLO representative would be given the rank of ambassador and that no diplomatic relations with 'Zionist Israel' would be maintained.¹⁰⁰ However, Israel's relations with Cambodia were not severed under the pro-American Khmer Republic of President Lon Nol. In 1972, a Khmer non-resident ambassador was nominated and later an embassy with a resident ambassador was opened in Jerusalem. This was the only Asian embassy to be opened in Jerusalem. However, the political and military events in the early part of the 1970s weakened the regime and in an effort to gain international recognition the Khmer Republic decided to adopt a policy of rapprochement with the moderate Arab states. Contacts were maintained with Jordan and Saudi Arabia.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in order to please the Arab states, the Khmer Embassy was transferred from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv and Khmer representatives increasingly supported anti-Israeli resolutions in the United Nations. The Khmer regime even went to the extent of recalling its ambassador from Israel shortly after he presented his credentials. Yet Israel continued to maintain cordial relations with the Khmer Republic and in 1974 it sent a small cash contribution for the war victims.¹⁰² Shortly before the final victory of the Khmer Rouge, the Israeli Embassy was forced to evacuate Phnom Penh, but even at that point Israeli officials did not talk about terminating diplomatic relations with Cambodia. A communiqué issued by the Israeli Embassy in Phnom Penh stated that Ambassador Avimor would depart for Laos for a period of three weeks.¹⁰³

After the fall of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975, Israeli-Khmer relations came to an end

and the buildings of the Israeli Embassy were handed over to the PLO. The atrocities committed by the oppressive regime of Pol Pot led to a certain degree of indifference on the part of the Israelis, many of whom felt betrayed by the new Khmer Rouge regime. Israel's contact with Cambodia remained mainly technological and agricultural, although it sent medical aid to Cambodia on several occasions as a humanitarian gesture and a sign of good will.¹⁰⁴ The fall of the oppressive Pol Pot regime and the Vietnamese invasion did not change Cambodia's attitude toward Israel. Weary of their past experiences and disappointments, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not embark on another diplomatic campaign.

The bilateral relations could not be restored to their former cordiality until the onset of the Middle East peace process. After the Israeli-Palestinian autonomy agreement the Cambodian government estimated that Arab resistance to its desire for rapprochement with Israel was about to diminish considerably. In September 1993, a month before Sihanouk resumed his position as President, the Cambodians asked Israel to establish diplomatic relations.¹⁰⁵ Diplomatic relations were restored in October 1993, but to date there is no Israeli embassy in Cambodia. When confronted with this issue, Israeli officials argued that this did not reflect a negative attitude on Israel's part but was simply a result of budget constraints.¹⁰⁶ Apart from Cambodia's Foreign Minister Nordom Sirivud's visit to Israel, contacts between the two countries have remained limited: Israeli technicians upgraded Cambodia's obsolete MIG-21 fighters,¹⁰⁷ and Israel also participated in a Mines Clearing Conference and contributed a modest amount of money for this project. However the bilateral trade has remained minimal.

Israeli involvement in Laos was far less intense than in Vietnam or Cambodia. The ties with Laos lacked the complexity of Israel's relations with the other two states of former French Indo-China. Although Laos aspired to maintain neutrality in world affairs, events in Vietnam and to a lesser extent in Cambodia had a tremendous effect on its relations with the Jewish state. Israel recognized Laos in 1954 and the first Israeli non-resident minister presented his credentials in 1957. Speaking to Sharett, Laos's Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, who was on a visit to Israel in 1960, expressed his desire to establish diplomatic relations with Israel despite his country's commitment to neutrality. He promised to bring the matter in front of the government's council and the King's court for approval. He said that he did not anticipate opposition; however, he added that since Laos had no diplomatic representatives in Europe or the Middle East, except for Paris and London, he saw no possibility of sending a non-resident minister to Israel.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Laotian officials had often made positive remarks about Israel. For example, in the autumn of 1966, the Laotian Ambassador to Israel boasted that he was among the pioneers who discovered Israel, and told the Israeli Ambassador in Paris that Israel could count on the friendship of the Laotian people.¹⁰⁹ In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok called for greater efforts aimed at upgrading the bilateral relations. He argued that only the opening of an embassy in Laos could help upgrade the ties.¹¹⁰ Moreover, he said that there was no objection to the opening of such an embassy other than financial constraints.¹¹¹

Like the rest of the countries in the region the Laotians sought to benefit from Israel's expertise in technology and land reclamation, and Laotian students visited Israel thereafter, while Israel provided both experts and equipment to Laos. Particularly

important was Israel's involvement in developing the 'Makong Project' designed to develop the Makong river valley. In addition, Israelis became involved in establishing model farms near the capital. The bilateral relations came to an end in 1975, when the communist Pathet Lao forces came to power. Thereafter there were almost no contacts between the two countries until the peace process got underway in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Laotian Foreign Minister came to Israel in 1993, and an agreement to cooperate in many areas was signed. On 7 December 1993 Laos announced its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and in August 1994 Rabin met the Laotian Foreign Minister and extended an invitation to the Prime Minister as well.¹¹² Although the two countries maintain full diplomatic relations Laos has little to offer—it has no commodities that could be useful to Israel, nor does it have the ability to benefit from expensive high-tech items or sophisticated arms which the Israelis can sell. It is little wonder, therefore, that trade between the two countries has remained minimal.¹¹³

A thorough perusal of the Israeli Foreign Ministry's documents in the Israel State Archives reveals that of the three states of former French Indo-China, Vietnam was regarded as the most worthy of Israel's efforts, while Cambodia and Laos occupied a secondary place in the eyes of the ministry's officials. Thus when the issue of appointing an Israeli diplomat to Laos was raised, Shimoni believed that setting up a permanent representative there was superfluous and mentioned the possibility that Israel's Minister in Bangkok be responsible for Israeli interests both in Laos and Cambodia.¹¹⁴

The Vietnam War stood in the way of greater Israeli involvement in all three states. Meaningful relations with the newly united Vietnamese state did not begin until the middle of 1986. It was only then that the Vietnamese regime decided to reassess its foreign policy orientation, which led to better relations with both its neighbors and the superpowers. Vietnam's desire to improve relations with Washington seems to have been the overriding factor leading to normalization of relations with Israel.

Cambodia's relations with Israel were a by-product of Sihanouk's pragmatic approach. As long as there was no serious challenge from the communists he could benefit from cordial relations with Israel. However, once he was forced to enter an alliance with the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia's honeymoon with Israel was over. The emergence of Pol Pot's regime left little desire in the Israeli Foreign Ministry to embark on another diplomatic initiative to win Cambodia's good will and, despite the recent rapprochement between the two countries, Cambodia occupies a secondary place on the Foreign Ministry's agenda.

Israel's relations with Laos followed a similar pattern in that they remained cordial until the Pathet Lao's rise to power. However, although Laos valued Israel's technical assistance it did not regard its relations with Israel as sufficiently important to warrant sending a special representative to Tel Aviv. When this issue was discussed with Israeli Foreign Ministry officials Phouma raised the possibility that Laos's representative in Paris should be responsible for contacts with Israel.¹¹⁵ Despite the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries Laos remained even more marginal than Cambodia on the Israeli Foreign Ministry's list of priorities.

The outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa had little effect on Israel's relations with these countries. Apart from occasional statements condemning the IDF's actions against the Palestinians in the occupied territories no significant change in these countries' relations with Israel has so far occurred. It is difficult and perhaps too early to assess the value of

Israel's contacts with the countries of this region. So far, all three countries seem to have benefited from Israeli technical know-how and connections with Washington. However, being underdeveloped and politically unstable, the value of these states to Israel has so far remained limited.

NOTES

1. Eshed to Israel's Legation in Tokyo, ISA 2561/3, 19 May 1954.
2. 'Vietnam-Israel Relations', ISA 3404/19, 24 November 1963, p. 1.
3. Israel's Legation in Tokyo to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2561/3, 6 November 1955.
4. 'Vietnam-Israel Relations', p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Cited *ibid.*, p. 5.
9. Dagan to Ben Horin, ISA 3313/52, 8 February 1960.
10. 'Memorandum: South Vietnam Invites Iraqi Journalists', ISA 3313/52, 21 October 1960.
11. 'Vietnam-Israel Relations', p. 5.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Levin to Shimoni, ISA 3404/19, 15 December 1963.
15. 'Vietnam-Israel Relations', p. 6.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
17. Shimoni to Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok, ISA 3404/19, 3 April 1962.
18. 'Vietnam-Israel Relations', p. 7.
19. Ngo Dinh Diem to Ben Gurion, ISA 3404/19, 31 March 1962.
20. Ben Gurion to Ngo Dinh Diem, ISA 3404/19, 27 May 1962.
21. *Le Monde*, 12 November 1963.
22. Dinstein to Ramati, ISA 3404/24, n.d.
23. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israel Connection*, p. 213.
24. 'Secretariat of State for Foreign Affairs: The Foreign Policy of the Republic of South Vietnam from 1954 to 1962', ISA 3404/19, p. 7.
25. Kariv to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/28, 6 September 1966.
26. Darom to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/33, 12 January 1966.
27. *New York Times*, 23 March 1966.
28. Evron to Bitan, ISA 4023/33, 21 April 1966.
29. According to Dayan's account, his aim was to see what a modern war was all about. He called the Vietnam War the only 'laboratory' of warfare. Dayan was appointed a military correspondent of American and Israeli newspapers. US Defense Secretary Robert Macnamara instructed General Westmoreland to open all doors to Dayan but not to expose him to danger. Avner Falk, *Moshe Dayan, the Man and the Myth: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Jerusalem: Cana, 1985), p. 241 [Hebrew].
30. Eytan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/28, 20 June 1966.

31. Darom to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/33, 17 January 1966.
32. Pazner to Elitzur, ISA 4023/20, 11 October 1966.
33. Eytan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/28, 21 September 1966.
34. Mikunis to Prime Minister, ISA 4023/33, 1 January 1966.
35. *Ha'aretz*, 18 September 1966.
36. *South Vietnam Vol. 2: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia 1966–1967* (New York: Facts on File, 1973), pp. 240–3.
37. *Hatzofe*, 22, 23 March 1966.
38. Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L.Schecter, *The Palace File* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 184.
39. *Davar*, 26 September 1966.
40. Eytan to Shimoni, ISA 3404/29, 17 July 1963.
41. *Ibid.*, 10 September 1963.
42. 'Communiqué by National Council for Peace on the Imperialist Aggression on North Vietnam, August 10, 1964', *Arab Political Encyclopedia*, 12th Year (July–September 1964), p. 61.
43. 'Joint Communiqué on U.A.R.-Vietnamese Relations', *Arab Political Encyclopedia*, 14th Year (January–June 1965), p. 127.
44. Johnson's aim to involve Israel in the Vietnam War was motivated by his desire to neutralize the opponents of that war. Johnson believed that if Israel contributed by doing something to help US war efforts, even such a thing as sending a medical team to Vietnam, American Jewry would be less critical of his handling of the war. Meron Medzini, *The Proud Jewess*, p. 284. As it turned out, American Jews remained steadfast in their opposition to the Vietnam War. Johnson once recalled that 'A bunch of rabbis came here one day in 1967 to tell me that I ought not to send a single screwdriver to Vietnam.' Cited in Seymour M.Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 191.
45. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israel Connection*, p. 191.
46. *Ma'ariv*, 25 September 1966.
47. Megido to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/22, 22 December 1966.
48. Embassy in Paris to Elitzur, ISA 4023/19, 15 February 1967.
49. Eytan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/29, 20 September 1967.
50. Lador to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4023/17, 26 February 1966.
51. *Yediot Aharonot*, 30 March 1967.
52. *Ma'ariv*, 2 April 1967.
53. Horam to the Foreign Ministry's Director General, ISA 4190/2, 8 December 1968.
54. 'Contacts with the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong', ISA 4190/2, 14 December 1968.
55. Ashadot to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4190/2, 23 December 1968.
56. Tas to Levin, ISA 4190/2, 4 September 1968.
57. Ron to Horam, ISA 4190/2, 17 July 1968.
58. Ostrovsky and Hoy, *By Way of Deception*, p. 251.
59. *Jerusalem Post*, 8 November 1990.
60. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael Radio in Hebrew, 2 February 1992.

61. *Davar*, 3 February 1992.
62. Hanoi VNA Radio in English, FBIS-EAS-93-052, 18 March 1993.
63. *Ha'aretz*, 19 March 1993.
64. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael Radio in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-93-091, 13 May 1993.
65. Hong Kong APF Radio in English, FBIS-EAS-93-052, 19 March 1993.
66. *Jerusalem Post*, 12 July 1993.
67. *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 July 1993; *Ma'ariv*, 13 July 1993.
68. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael Radio in Hebrew FBIS-NES-93-132, 13 July 1993; *Hatzofe*, 13 July 1993.
69. *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 July 1993.
70. *Jerusalem Post*, 25 January 1996, 7 February 1996, 18 March 1997.
71. Horam to Israeli Legation in Tokyo, ISA 2561/3, 14 February 1955.
72. Shimoni to Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok, ISA 3417/6, 3 October 1962.
73. Mann to Kidron, ISA 3417/6, 3 October 1962.
74. Author's interview with Avimor, Jerusalem, 6 July 1993.
75. Shimoni to Kidron, ISA 3417/6, 25 December 1963.
76. Maurice Fischer to Gershon Avner [French], 15 February 1950. *Relations Between Israel and Asian and African States: A Guide to Selected Documentation No. 2: Cambodia*, Shimon Avimor (ed.) (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem: The Harry S Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, 1986). Document No. 3, p. 37.
77. Author's interview with Avimor.
78. PRO FO/371, 142302, VR10387/1, 29 January 1959.
79. Moshe Sharett to Sirik Matak [French], 15 June 1956, *Relations Between Israel and Asian and African States*, Document No. 4, pp. 38–9.
80. Ben Horin to Golda Meir, ISA FO/2561/5, 5 December 1956.
81. British Embassy in Phnom Penh to Selwyn Lloyd, PRO FO371, 142302, VR10387/3, 2 March 1959.
82. Shimon Avimor, 'Israel's Technical Assistance to Cambodia', *ASIEN*, No. 23 (April 1978), p. 10 n8.
83. 'L'amitié Khmero-Arab', *Relations Between Israel and Asian and African States*, Document No. 15, pp. 38–9.
84. Author's interview with Avimor.
85. Shimoni to Bar-On, ISA 3595/30, 5 May 1964.
86. *Relations Between Israel and Asian and African States*, Documents Nos 9–13, pp. 44–9.
87. Author's interview with Avimor.
88. Embassy in Bangkok to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4066/22, 7 March 1967.
89. Benshalom to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4066/22, 30 May; 29 June 1967.
90. Foreign Ministry to Embassy in Phnom Penh, ISA 4066/22, 2 July 1967.
91. Benshalom to Elitzur, ISA 4066/22, 6 July 1967.
92. *Realités Cambodiennes*, 14 July 1967.
93. Darom to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4066/22, 18 July 1967.
94. Benshalom to Elitzur, ISA 4066/22, 1 September 1967.
95. Benshalom to Er'el, ISA 4061/21, 13 December 1967.

96. Author's interview with Avimor.
97. *Realités Cambodiennes*, 12 July 1968.
98. Author's interview with Avimor.
99. *Ibid.*
100. 'Le Prince Nordam Sianouk definit la politique extérieure a venir du Cambodge', *Nouvelle Du Monde: AFP*, 20 March 1975, Document No. 19, p. 55 [French].
101. *Ibid.*, Documents Nos 16–18, pp. 52–4.
102. *Ibid.*, Document No. 14, p. 50.
103. *Ibid.*, Document No. 20, p. 56.
104. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 October 1979; Jerusalem Qol Yisrael Radio in Hebrew, 2 February 1992.
105. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 September 1993.
106. Author's interview with Choshen.
107. *Jerusalem Post*, 9 February 1995.
108. Shimoni, *Diary Notes*, ISA FO/2554/9, 3 July 1956.
109. Almog to Elitzur, ISA 4023/20, 14 November 1966.
110. Daron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4037/13, 29 March 1967.
111. Author's interview with Choshen.
112. FBIS-NES-93-234, 8 December 1993; FBIS-NES-94-168, 30 August 1994.
113. Author's interview with Choshen.
114. Shimoni to Foreign Office, ISA 2560/8, 18 July 1956.
115. Ben Horin to Foreign Office, ISA FO/2561/5, 30 November 1956.

Thailand—Relations with an American Ally

Thailand's policy toward Israel was determined by several factors, the most obvious of which was Thailand's natural aversion to treaties and alliances. Yet unlike other Asian nations, which experienced colonial rule and tended to regard Zionism as a tool of colonialism, Thailand remained unoccupied during the age of imperialism and the rhetoric connecting the two movements did not gain popularity there. In addition, Thailand's foreign policy was consistently pro-US and anti-Chinese. The aversion which Thailand's leaders had toward communism had clearly manifested itself already in 1952, when Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram decided to ban the Communist Party. The fear of a North Vietnamese invasion through Laos intensified Bangkok's opposition to China and North Vietnam. Moreover, the fact that the Pathet Lao engaged in supporting tribes hostile to the Thai regime caused concern among officials in Bangkok. Consequently, Thailand supported the American containment policy, which was aimed at isolating both China and North Korea. Thereafter, Thailand began to depend increasingly on US financial aid.¹ It participated in the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and signed a mutual security pact with the United States.

The coup d'état of 16 September 1957 which brought Sarit Thanrat to power intensified Thai-US cooperation. Though beneficial, this cooperation triggered a strong reaction from China, which criticized Thailand for collaborating with the United States in its endeavors to dominate the Middle East.² As it turned out, however, Israeli-Thai relations benefited from this state of affairs. Whereas the nonaligned countries of Asia lashed out at Israel for colluding with Great Britain and France during the Suez Affair the Thai government tended to ignore the issue and except for sporadic editorial comments in the press not much was said about the event. Thanrat's successor, Thanom Kittikachorn continued the tradition of reliance on US help.³ Thai dependence on the United States intensified considerably when the Vietcong made it clear that after its victory it would undermine the Thai regime.⁴ During the 1960s, Thailand allowed the CIA to use its bases in order to conduct its clandestine operations against the communists. In addition, it sent 25 battalions to fight alongside the anti-communist groups, which supported the CIA and allowed the United States to establish bases on Thai soil.⁵ The identity of interests with the United States encouraged the Thai government to adopt a pro-US stand on most foreign policy issues; as one commentator remarked, 'The past military governments had acquiesced to the American policy and action so much that Thai foreign policy was thought to be merely an adjunct to Washington's thinking.'⁶ Consequently, the anti-Israeli bias characteristic of the foreign policy of other Asian nations was lacking here. Moreover, Thailand's preoccupation with regional politics minimized the effect of Pan-Arabism. Nasser's influence in Thailand remained insignificant and even the defeat of the Arab states by Israel in the Six Day War

did not trigger hostile remarks from the Thai government.

It was only in October 1973, when the military regime was overthrown, that the ties between Thailand and the United States began to be questioned. The newly acquired freedom of expression led to verbal attacks against the United States and the activities of the CIA in Thailand. Demonstrating students demanded an independent foreign policy and an end to the 'follow Washington' policy.⁷ When Sino-American relations began improving in the wake of former President Richard Nixon's trip to China, the Thai government embarked on a policy of readjustment of its foreign policy that culminated in the establishment of diplomatic ties with China in 1975, and North Korea in 1976. This new orientation in Thailand's policy happened to coincide with the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil crisis, both of which had an adverse effect on the Thai economy and led to coolness in Israeli-Thai relations. However, this proved to be only a temporary crisis. Officials in Thailand did not cease to be amazed by Israel's technical expertise. Following the withdrawal of US forces, Thailand's relations with Washington improved considerably. The weakening of Pan-Arab sentiment and the onset of the Middle East peace process allowed the bilateral relations to resume their normal course. The rise of the six-man junta in Thailand following the coup d'état of 23 February 1991 did not have adverse effect on the bilateral relations. Since both India and China began warming to Israel neither the military nor the numerous parties in Thailand saw any problem in maintaining contact with Israel and even the disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza, which erupted in the autumn of 2000, did not reverse the friendly course of the bilateral relations. In order to understand the reasons why Israeli-Thai relations remained stable it is necessary to trace their origins from the beginning.

Israel's relations with Thailand lacked the warmth and friendliness which characterized its relations with Burma. When the Partition Plan for Palestine was debated in the General Assembly in November 1947, the Thai representative was the only one absent from the meeting. Thailand's attempt to keep a distance from Israel at that time was inextricably tied to its relations with neighboring China. Speaking on behalf of the Provisional Government of the State of Israel, Sharett asked Thailand to recognize the Jewish state.⁸ The Thai government did not respond favorably, arguing that granting recognition to other countries would provide the Communist People's Republic of China with an excuse to demand recognition from Thailand.⁹ Yet when Thailand was a candidate for election to the Trusteeship Council at the UN General Assembly it appealed for Israel's support.¹⁰ Israel complied with the request and in 1953 the Israeli delegation voted for Prince Waitayakorn Wan as the Assembly's President.¹¹ As Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem saw it, Thailand's lack of experience with colonial rule was an advantage that could be exploited. The rhetoric concerning the alleged connection between Zionism and imperialism that was so prominent in the official statements of many Asian nations which had been under colonial rule was less influential in Thailand. Yet the Thais were not as easy to reach as the Israelis had hoped.

Israel sought to establish relations with Thailand primarily in order to enhance trade. However, given the nature of the Thai regime this could hardly be achieved without a formal political presence in Bangkok. In his letter to the Rosenkrantz Company, L.W.Zerner, the representative of the Company of Cutters and Exporters of Zircons and Synthetic Stone, writes:

I am sorry to inform you that the police here refused to grant the permit and gave as a reason: that Israel is not represented here, and without a consul they seem to refuse it. I assure you that I have tried all I can do. We have here a police dictatorship and nothing can be done against their decision.¹²

In 1953 Thailand agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and thereafter it became more intensely involved in Middle Eastern affairs. On 4 August 1953 Perez B. Jacobson was appointed Honorary Consul of Israel in Bangkok. Concerned that the Arab states might interpret this step as siding with Israel in the Middle East conflict, in March 1954 the Thai government embarked on a diplomatic campaign that led to the establishment of diplomatic ties with most of them.¹³

On 11 June 1954 Israel's Minister in Tokyo, Joseph Linton, arrived in Bangkok to present his credentials as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Israel.¹⁴ The Thai government had come to realize that relations with Israel could be rewarding.¹⁵ A visit by a Burmese military delegation to Israel had spurred much interest in Thailand, whose ambassador demonstrated curiosity and interest in Israel's expertise in the agricultural and technological fields. Hacothen, who witnessed the event, reported to the Foreign Ministry saying:

The Thai Ambassador is courting me and several days ago he trapped me into a long conversation. Burma's activities in our country and my activity here leave him restless... The Ambassador tried to squeeze from me details on the activities of the Burmese military delegation in the country, but I did not put down my defenses.¹⁶

At the same time, the Thai government considered it essential to improve its relations with the Arab states and did not wish to show any preference for Israel. This was apparently the reason why Linton did not receive a warm welcome when he visited Bangkok in December 1954.¹⁷ Negotiations between Israel and Thailand continued but Arab diplomats continuously pressured the Thai government not to appoint a minister to Israel.¹⁸ Thailand's Prime Minister Pibul Songram said that he would be willing to visit Israel if invited but made it clear that he was interested in good relations with Egypt as well.¹⁹ In July 1955, the Thai Ambassador visited Israel. He stated that his country would welcome the prospect of better commercial relations with Israel and that he was in favor of setting up an Israeli legation or commercial mission in Bangkok. He also raised the possibility of joint commercial enterprises with Israel.²⁰ Israeli Foreign Ministry officials welcomed the possibility of good relations with Thailand and the Thai government appeared enthusiastic about the idea.²¹

One of the reasons why Prince Wan demonstrated an interest in relations with Israel was his country's desire to find markets for its rice. Moreover, the Thais believed that Jewish influence in the international market could be a great asset to them.²² They agreed to the opening of a resident Israeli Embassy in Bangkok in 1958, but did not express an interest in opening a Thai Embassy in Israel. They saw benefit in cooperating with Israel in all fields but at the same time sought to avoid complications and to maintain strict neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. A letter from the Israeli Ambassador in Thailand

summarizes the Thai attitude toward Israel in those early years. It read in part:

The guiding principle of the Thai attitude towards us is the preservation of maximum neutrality towards us and the Arab states. Generally, the Thais seek to avoid as much as possible being entangled in disputes that do not affect them directly... The Thais have a natural sentiment towards the Arabs. As much as we try to talk about our being an Asian nation, we are still considered Europeans here. On the other hand...the Thais have no special interest in the Bandung type Afro-Asian movement.²³

That the Thai government did not show much enthusiasm about treaties and alliances and did not respond with alacrity to formal requests to send ambassadors was not necessarily a reflection of their attitude toward Israel. This tendency appears to be ingrained in Thai culture, as H.G. Quaritch Wales noted:

It was a maxim of Siamese kings to receive many embassies, but to send as few as possible. There was honor in receiving an embassy, but on the other hand, there was always present the idea that the one who sent the first embassy was offering homage... Another characteristic of the Siamese monarchs was their dislike of concluding a treaty. While prepared to make promises, they did not like to commit themselves to writing.²⁴

That successive Thai leaders managed to maintain cordial relations with Israel throughout most the country's existence was largely due to the nature of the Thai regime. In his study *Modernization without Development*, Norman Jacobs characterized Thai society as patrimonialistic. According to his analysis, the Thai ruler exercises an absolute rule and his decisions remain unchallenged. He decides on all matters and ignores those who disapprove of his policies. Although the leader's attitude is paternalistic and compassionate, compliance with his decisions is rewarded while challenges to his decision are severely punished. According to this analysis, the patrimonialistic leader maintains control by various administrative measures which include the use of force and espionage. The patrimonialistic leader does not allow resistance in any form and when opponents rise they are normally removed from power.²⁵ This explains the absence of powerful opposition to cordial relations with Israel.

Israel's relations with Thailand were never as cordial as they had been with Burma nor did they cool off as suddenly as in the Burmese case. Yet Bangkok continued to avoid what it regarded as unnecessary commitments. The Thai government believed that it could benefit from Israeli friendship without making commitments and when confronted by the Israelis, officials in Bangkok resorted to excuses. For example, when the Israeli Ambassador in Bangkok raised the possibility of establishing a Thai legation in Israel, the Thai Foreign Minister argued that his country had difficulty finding appropriate personnel for foreign service.²⁶

Israel's desire to promote relations with Thailand was motivated by both strategic and political considerations. Its prime concern was the expansion of Arab involvement in support of the Muslim movement in the Pattani district. It was precisely for this reason that an Israeli military delegation arrived in Thailand in July 1961.²⁷ Both Golda Meir

and Dayan visited Thailand in the following year. According to Israeli Embassy sources in Bangkok a tendency to stress the pro-Asia identity of Thailand was evident in 1965 and they attributed the Thai government's refusal to establish an Embassy in Israel to that trend.²⁸ On 1 March 1966, Thailand decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and by the end of that year it had established diplomatic relations with Jordan.²⁹ However, officials in Bangkok had continuously argued that budget constraints prevented their government from opening a legation in Israel.³⁰ Writing from Bangkok, the Israeli Ambassador said:

Objectively speaking, we should recognize that Thailand does not yet have vital interests in ties with Israel in order to justify the establishment of an embassy, while they are grappling with great difficulties, particularly with regards to manpower, in order to implement their plan to establish embassies in other countries, in which perhaps Thailand has interests no less important than in Israel.³¹

While most Asian countries reacted with fury to Israel's swift victory over the Arabs in the Six Day War the Thais did not conceal their admiration of the IDF. However, due to its sensitivity to negative reaction by neighboring Muslim countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, Thailand abstained in UN resolutions pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thailand's attempt to balance its policy toward this conflict had no adverse effect on the bilateral relations. Allon had good reasons to praise the ties between the two countries and shortly after the Six Day War, Dayan met the Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces.

Another reason for Thailand's cautious attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict was the existence of a large Muslim minority in the country.³² However, the Muslim community was unable to use its leverage on the government in order to keep the two countries apart. The Thai government had managed to keep the Muslims that lived in its four provinces in check. Successive Thai leaders succeeded in controlling the Muslims by replacing Muslim officials with Buddhists, either from the central or from nearby provinces. Although the government had often declared its adherence to 'rule by local people', which meant that the official in the region should be a native, such intentions rarely materialized. Moreover, many Thais opposed the idea of 'rule by local people' precisely because this could provide Muslims with the opportunity to rise.³³

The bilateral relations remained smooth despite occasional disruptions caused by the Palestinian issue. Thailand had occasionally demonstrated sympathy to the Palestinian cause. In the summer of 1967, it decided to send 50 tons of rice to the Palestinian refugees.³⁴ This attempt to appear even-handed was an outcome of Thailand's uncertainty about its future relations with the United States. On 9 September 1968 Thailand's Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman said in a speech at Kasetsart University that if the United States pulled out from Vietnam, he would ask it to withdraw its troops from Thailand.³⁵ And on 20 March 1969 he said at a press conference, 'Now we are not sure of the United States' assistance in the future so we have to plan to help ourselves.'³⁶

On 28 December 1972 four Palestinian terrorists held six Israeli hostages at the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok. The Thai government skillfully managed to convince the attackers

to release the hostages. When the Thai government requested that Israel return the bodies of two Arab terrorists killed during the Sabena hijack at Lydda airport in May 1972, Israel complied. The Thai government managed to handle the issue in an objective manner and despite its firm stand against the Palestinian terrorists it did not wish to be identified as a staunch supporter of Israel. The official stand of the Thai government toward the Arab-Israeli conflict was similar to the one adopted by most Asian states. In an interview with the *Bangkok Post*, Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister Chartchai Chunahaven said, 'We, together with other ASEAN governments would like to see Israel withdraw its forces immediately from territories seized from Egypt, Jordan and Syria in 1967... The UN must also do something to help Palestinian refugees who are suffering in the desert.'³⁷

At first, Israel had an honorary consul general and later a nonresident ambassador representing Israeli interests in Thailand. The bilateral relations remained cordial but cooled off after the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil crisis. Thailand's cool attitude can be partially attributed to a fundamental change which had taken place in Thai foreign policy. By the early 1970s, a process of reassessment in Thailand's foreign policy had taken place. Thai leaders concluded that relations with the United States were not as critical as with countries like China and North Korea. Moreover, in October 1973 the military regime in Thailand was overthrown. This event led Thailand to question the value of its relations with the United States. Tension in US-Thai relations mounted again by the mid-1970s, when Thailand demanded that all US troops be removed from Thai soil.³⁸ This policy change, the purpose of which was to strengthen Thailand's ties with China and North Korea, two countries which remained hostile to Israel, had prevented the Thais from overt expressions of sympathy toward Israel.

The Thai government did not change its position on Israel's need to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 242 requiring withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, but it made occasional remarks demonstrating an understanding of Israel's security needs. Thus for example, Chairman of the Thai Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Yuad Loesrit said that his country did not question Israel's basic needs.³⁹ The visit by Princesses Sirindhorn and Chulabhorn to Israel during the spring of 1977 brought the two countries closer. The visitors praised Israel for its assistance to Thailand. Indeed, relations with Israel had greatly benefited the Thai government. Israel cooperated with Thailand in many fields. Israeli experts provided valuable information regarding farming methods, water control, irrigation, land reclamation, disease control and numerous other problems. Tahal became involved in developing an irrigation system in Thailand. In addition, Israeli construction and service companies were active there. The Histadrut had closely cooperated with the trade union movement in Thailand and numerous joint projects were carried out. Between 1961 and 1981, over 800 Thais studied in Israel and some 200 Israeli experts visited Thailand. What stimulated this cooperation was the common interests shared by both countries. In June 1977, Thai Interior Minister Samak Sundaravey visited Israel and in one of his speeches he said, 'I feel we are very much in the same boat.' He was referring to economic and security problems common to both countries.⁴⁰

The bilateral relations began to improve gradually after the opening of the Suez Canal, which gave Israel easier access to the Far East.⁴¹ The cooperation between the two

countries intensified and the Thai government welcomed Israeli assistance in agriculture, science and technology. Israel provided training to Thai technicians and engineers who arrived in greater numbers. An Israeli program conducted between 1976 and 1982 trained 454 Thais in a wide variety of technical fields,⁴² and the cooperation extended to the military field as well. Following the Thai military coup of 1976, Thailand began purchasing small arms from Israel. Also, the Mossad had an important headquarters in Bangkok. Mossad agents helped in the production and export of opium as a way of obtaining means to finance its operations.⁴³

Israel's goal was not only to expand trade with Thailand but also to utilize these contacts in order to reap political benefits. Thus when Kimche visited Bangkok in the spring of 1984, he urged Foreign Minister Air Marshal Siddhi Savetsila to adopt a less consistently anti-Israeli posture in its UN vote.⁴⁴ Contacts between the two countries intensified during the mid-1980s. In November 1985 Ukrit Mongkolnavin, President of Thailand's National Assembly arrived in Jerusalem where he met Shamir and Herzog. When the UN Security Council voted on a resolution condemning Israel for the incident on Temple Mount, Thailand abstained,⁴⁵ and when the Asian Games Federation decided to bar Israel from the games scheduled to take place in Bangkok, Prime Minister Chomanand Kriangsak supported Israel's right to participate.⁴⁶

Israel, however, did not seem eager to take the opportunity to expand its trading relations with Thailand. By the middle of 1980, criticism against Israeli industrialists and trade officials—that they were not seriously attempting to tap the Thai market—was heard with increasing frequency. Critics argued that Thailand had great potential for profit; that its economy was vibrant; that its market economy provided great opportunities for investors and that its regime had been stable. All these factors, they argued, should have encouraged successive Israeli governments and businessmen alike to expand their commercial ties with Thailand. Despite these favorable conditions, the critics added, Israel's trade with Thailand remained minuscule. According to data published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics for the first nine month of 1985, imports from Thailand rose by 103 percent to US\$14.4 million, while Israeli exports fell by 14.77 percent to US\$10.5 million. For 1985 as a whole, Israeli imports from Thailand were estimated to have reached US\$18 million, while exports to that country stood at about US\$14 million. Thai businessmen provided a partial answer to this problem by arguing that Israeli firms failed to develop a long-term strategy of sales and investments. Chusak Himathongkom, Vice President of Bangkok Bank Ltd, commented on this issue saying that the reason why the bilateral trade did not develop enough was that 'far too often Israelis tend to come here, sell or offer a particular service, and then leave. What Thailand needs is joint-venture investment for the long-term. This investment need not be capital—we are looking for technology and expertise.'⁴⁷ What prevented Israeli companies and agencies from expanding their long-term operations in Thailand was not only the great cost involved, but also the fact that Israel did not have diplomatic relations with Thailand's Muslim neighbors, which still boycotted Israeli companies and products.

At the end of 1987, 13 Thai businessmen arrived in Israel. Trade Ministry officials regarded this visit as a breakthrough in the economic relations between the countries. The two sides began negotiating the opening of an air route to Bangkok. The volume of trade between the two countries had slowly increased. It reached US\$22 million in the first six

months of 1988, compared with US\$14 million for the same period in the previous year. The trade included chemicals, machinery, cotton and agricultural products.⁴⁸ Yet compared to its trade with other countries in the area, Israel's trade with Thailand remained modest. In 1991, it totaled only US\$88 million in exports and US\$83 million in imports.⁴⁹

That relations with Israel were deemed important in the eyes of the Thai government is evident from the fact that Bangkok refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with the radical Arab states, while for the most part Thailand maintained good relations with the moderate Arab states.⁵⁰ This cautious attitude was adopted deliberately in order not to antagonize Israel and the United States. When the *Siam Post* revealed that Thai companies were sending their employees to work in Libyan chemical plants, the Thai government quickly yielded to US pressure to investigate and bring these activities to an end,⁵¹ and this affair did not cause a crisis in Israeli-Thai relations, which continued to improve. On 19 December 1989, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn arrived in Israel and received a royal welcome from Israeli leaders and other dignitaries.⁵² When the Israelis sought support of the Afro-Asian bloc in order to repeal the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism the Thai government reassured them that it would support the drive.⁵³ In the spring of 1993 Prime Minister Chuan Likphai told Peres, who stopped over in Bangkok en route to Beijing, that Thailand would look into the possibility of opening an embassy in Israel and would seek to implement the aviation agreement signed between the two countries. Likphai expressed his gratitude for Israel's efforts to improve Thailand's agriculture and said, 'We see Israel as a model of a country that has made impressive achievements in the scientific and technological field.'⁵⁴

The recent changes in the global arena, and the onset of the Middle East peace process allowed the Thai government to strive toward improving its ties with Israel without risking its ties with the Arab states. In December 1996 the two countries began discussing the possibility of a free trade agreement, the first between Israel and any Asian country.⁵⁵ However, Israeli manufacturers remained concerned that the Israeli market would be flooded with cheap Thai products. In the following year the two countries signed an agreement that provided Thailand with Israeli aid in improving Thai farming techniques.⁵⁶

The unprecedented growth of the Israeli economy which had occurred by the end of the decade benefited many foreign workers who flocked to Israel in search of employment. Among the many foreigners who came in search of employment were Thai workers. However, Israeli employers were reluctant to hire workers without skills or proper training. Following negotiations with the Israelis the Thai government agreed to invest US\$100 million in training these workers.⁵⁷ Anxious to continue benefiting from the opportunities which the Israeli market offered, the Thai government decided to eliminate obstacles and signed a treaty agreeing to mutual transfer of prisoners.⁵⁸

The main argument in this chapter has been that Israel's ties with Thailand were exceptionally cordial compared to other Asian nations. This cordiality can be attributed to several factors. First, Thai leaders developed connections to the West which remained powerful despite their attempts to improve their relations with the communist countries of the region. Thai leaders had consistently sought to model their country along Western lines. Second, their aversion to communism, which manifested itself during the early

1950s, had turned Israel into an attractive partner. The moderate form of socialism adopted in Israel in its early days was far less threatening than communism, which seemed to infiltrate Thailand's borders and lead to the collapse of its regime. Thai officials who witnessed the benefits of the Israeli-Burmese cooperation during the 1950s were highly impressed by what Israel could do to modernize their country. Moreover, the fact that Thailand was not attracted to the propaganda equating imperialism with Zionism, which swept most of the nonaligned nations during the 1950s, helped strengthen the bilateral ties. That Thailand seemed unwilling to commit itself to formal relations with Israel was due largely to its natural, noncommittal character.

The reassessment in Thailand's foreign policy which took place during the early 1970s led to a temporary crisis in the bilateral relations. However, the Thais proved to be exceptionally pragmatic and continued to seek Israel's cooperation. After the withdrawal of US troops from Thai soil in July 1976, Thailand managed to maintain friendly relations with both China and the United States. The Thai connection with Israel did not seem to stand in the way of cordial relations with the great powers. The decline of Pan-Arabism and the onset of the peace process facilitated Thailand's cooperation with Israel even further. Neither the military leaders who came to power in the coup of February 1991, nor the spokesmen of the numerous political parties, saw any danger with expanding the cooperation with Israel. The 1990s witnessed an unprecedented growth in the bilateral cooperation in many areas and even the failure of the peace process and the Intifada al-Aqsa did not bring an end to the cooperation between the two countries. Thai officials continue dealing with Israel without fanfare. So far this connection has proved so resilient that neither the political turmoil nor the economic chaos in Thailand is likely to have an adverse affect on it.

NOTES

1. After Eisenhower became President in 1953, US military aid to Thailand jumped from US\$12 million in 1952 to US\$55.8 million in 1953. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun Through Three Decades 1932–1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 283.
2. For example, a statement from 3 November 1958, by the spokesman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission protesting against the persecution of Chinese in Thailand said that, 'The Thailand authorities, under pressure from the United States, have gone a step further in following US policy, in order to counterbalance the series of setbacks it has suffered in the Near and Middle East.' R.K.Jain (ed.), *China and Thailand 1949–1983*, Document No. 43 (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1984), p. 39.
3. In his letter dated 12 September 1967 to President Lyndon B. Johnson a US official, Richard Helms, writes, 'The situation of Thailand would be both perilous and complicated. Sooner or later, both Hanoi and Peking would bring pressure in an attempt to force Bangkok into a "cooperative" relationship. [...] We have no sound basis for estimating how the Thais would respond to such pressure. Our best guess is that, despite the discredit the US would suffer because of the outcome in Vietnam,

- the present Thai leadership would continue to seek US support.' Helms to Johnson, David M. Barrett (ed.), *Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1997), p. 472.
4. Nevins to Johnson, *ibid.*, pp. 415–16.
 5. Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 261–2.
 6. Sarasin Viraphol, *Directions in Thai Foreign Policy*, Occasional Paper No. 40 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p. 29.
 7. Corine Phuangkasem, *Thailand's Foreign Relations*, Occasional Paper No. 74 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), pp. 36–7.
 8. Sharett to Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, ISA 2560/8, 20 May 1948.
 9. Keren to Mairon, ISA 2560/8, 27 June 1950.
 10. Waithayakon to Eban, ISA 2560/8, 27 July 1950.
 11. Eshed to Jacobson, ISA 2560/8, 27 September 1953.
 12. Zerner to Rosenkrantz, ISA FO/2554/17a, 28 April 1953.
 13. Fischl to Jacobson, ISA 2560/8, 6 April 1954.
 14. *Standard*, 5 June 1954; *Bangkok Tribune*, 10 June 1954.
 15. Author's interview with Choshen.
 16. Hacothen to Foreign Ministry, ISA FO/2560/9, 8 September 1954.
 17. Jacobson to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/8, 14 December 1954.
 18. Linton to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/8, 17 December 1954.
 19. *Ha'aretz*, 9 June 1955.
 20. Gazit to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/8, 7 July 1955.
 21. Author's interview with Choshen.
 22. Ofer to Foreign Ministry, ISA FO/2560/9, 14 September 1955.
 23. Kariv to Israel's Embassy in The Hague, ISA 3347/74, 1 January 1960.
 24. H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1931), p. 186.
 25. For a detailed analysis see Norman Jacobs, *Modernization without Development: Thailand as Asian Case Study* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 27–95.
 26. Kidron to Shimoni, ISA 3347/76, 4 February 1961.
 27. Kidron to Israel's Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3347/76, 5 July 1961.
 28. Report on Thailand, ISA 3603/16, 7 September 1965.
 29. *Bangkok Post*, 1 March 1966.
 30. Israel's Embassy in Bangkok to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4075/23, 4 March 1967.
 31. Darom to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4075/25, 21 June 1966.
 32. *Monthly Survey*, No. 1 (January 1973), p. 30.
 33. Arong Suthasasna, 'Thai Society and the Muslim Minority', in Andrew D.W. Forbes (ed.), *The Muslims of Thailand Vol 2: Politics of the Malay-Speaking South* (Bihar, India: Center for South East Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 97–8.
 34. *Bangkok Post*, 16 August 1967.
 35. Likhit Dhiravegin, *Thai Politics: Selected Aspects of Development and Change* (Bangkok: Tri-Sciences Publishing House, 1985), p. 547.
 36. Cited in *ibid.*

37. Cited in *Jerusalem Post*, 10 December 1973.
38. Charles Morrison and Astri Suhrke, *Strategies for Survival: The Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian Countries* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 128.
39. *Jerusalem Post*, 18 September 1976.
40. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1977; 31 March 1983.
41. Shimon Avimor, 'Israel's Relations with Southeast Asia', *Middle East Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter 1989–90), p. 41.
42. Robert Muscat, *Thailand and the United States: Developing Society and Foreign Aid* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 65.
43. Ostrovsky and Hoy, *By Way of Deception*, p. 277.
44. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 1984.
45. *Ibid.*, 2 February 1986.
46. *Ibid.*, 9 March 1978.
47. Cited in *ibid.*, 27 February 1986.
48. *Ibid.*, 29 September 1988.
49. Author's interview with Choshen.
50. Thailand's relations with Saudi Arabia were cordial despite occasional incidents which marred them. For example, in 1989 a Thai servant in the palace of Prince Faisal stole 200 pounds of jewelry valued at more than US\$20 million. After his return to Thailand he was sentenced to five years in prison. The box of jewels was returned to Saudi Arabia but many items were still missing and some were replaced with cheap imitations. In the following year, three Saudi diplomats and a businessman were murdered in Bangkok. The suspicion that high government officials were behind the theft and the murders increased considerably in August 1994, when two more persons were mysteriously assassinated. David Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy: The Life and Times of M.R.Seni Pramoj* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996), p. 288.
51. *Bangkok Post*, 30 March 1993.
52. *Jerusalem Post*, 19, 20 December 1989.
53. *Ibid.*, 28 November 1991.
54. *Al-Hamishmar*, 20 May 1993.
55. *Jerusalem Post*, 6 December 1996.
56. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1997.
57. *Ibid.*, 5 August 1997.
58. *Ibid.*, 13 August 1997.

The Philippines—Relations with a Former US Colony

Israeli-Philippine relations are noted for their exceptional cordiality. Both the Christian background of the Philippines and its association with the United States contributed to this state of affairs. While Christianity reinforced its awareness of the Jewish link to Palestine, Manila's friendly relations with the United States turned Israel into a natural ally. From an Israeli point of view, cordial relations with the Philippines were important because they provided Israel with an opportunity to cooperate with the United States in a strategically important area and thus enabled it to justify the special relationship which had developed in the early years and culminated in a strategic alliance which seemed to have lost its relevance in the new world order that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Philippine government was in a position to silence Islamic criticism against Israel and thus allow it to expand and diversify its connections in Oceania. However, despite the existence of powerful motives for rapprochement there were serious obstacles, which at times made it difficult for the Philippines to warm to Israel. Foremost among these was the country's geopolitical position and its proximity to the countries of Asia, which espoused nonalignment as an article of faith. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Philippine government became a target of intense criticism by these nations, which disapproved of its alliance with the United States and its ties with Israel. The fact that Asian countries like China and India had long subscribed to the notion that imperialism and Zionism were inevitably linked intensified their criticism of the United States, the Philippines and particularly Israel.

In addition to criticism from the Asian states the Philippine government had to face domestic opposition from Muslims and communists alike. This chapter explores the evolution of Israeli-Philippine relations. It argues that despite short periods of disagreement Manila managed to preserve its connection with Israel throughout the entire period of its existence. The imperatives which kept this connection alive were quite formidable. First and foremost were Manila's ties with the United States, which helped orient its foreign policy in Israel's direction. Second, Israel's ability to train soldiers and to provide arms was indispensable for the Philippine leaders who were locked in a constant battle against communist insurgents and Muslim militants. Criticism against the Philippine government was quite formidable in the early years and it was only with the onset of the Middle East peace process and the changing political environment, which followed the demise of the Soviet Union, that officials in Manila began to feel secure regarding their country's connection with Israel.

When the United Nations voted on the Partition Plan the Philippines voted in favor. This move, as Moshe Yegar, a former Foreign Ministry official said, was inspired by the United States.¹ On 1 April 1949 the Philippine government recognized Israel and in

February 1950, Ernest Simke was nominated as Honorary Consul in Manila. This proved to be a prelude to solid and mutually beneficial relations between the two countries.

The two countries cooperated in many areas, particularly in the technical field. This cooperation extended to official matters affecting the two countries' membership in the United Nations. For example, when the Philippines sought election to the UN Economic and Social Council, it asked for and obtained Israel's support.² However, there were problems along the way. The country's proximity to Asia's nonaligned nations and the pressure exerted by the Arab states and the Muslim minority in the Philippines were serious obstacles which both countries had to overcome in order to maintain normal relations. While its relations with the United States encouraged cordial relations with Israel, Muslim pressure at home forced Manila to demonstrate solidarity with the Arabs. In one of the debates on Palestine at the beginning of 1951, the Philippine Delegation in the United Nations supported the pro-Arab stand by introducing an amendment that was accepted by the Political Committee but later deleted by the General Assembly under pressure by the great powers. The amendment read as follows: 'In particular with regard to the repatriation of refugees wishing to return to their homes, and also with regard to the just and equitable evaluation and compensation for the properties of those not wishing to return.' Although Israel protested, Foreign Ministry officials understood Manila's predicament.³ Moreover, the Philippine government acted immediately in an effort to rectify the situation by an outright disapproval of the delegation's amendment. Responding to Shimoni's protest, the Philippine representative argued that his delegation acted on its own accord and without authorization from the Philippine Foreign Ministry.⁴ However, the tension between the two countries did not immediately subside. Israeli officials were displeased because Philippine Airlines routed its Europe-Asia flights via Lebanon instead of via Lydda.⁵ Moreover, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials complained that the Philippine government did not move quickly enough in the normalization process and it was not before the early summer of 1954 that it finally decided to appoint an honorary consul in Israel.⁶

On 23 May 1955 the Israeli government proposed a Treaty of Friendship providing perpetual peace between the two countries; settlement of disputes by peaceful means; setting up representatives in each other's country and providing protection to nationals of each country.⁷ The Philippine Undersecretary seemed optimistic and promised to see to it that the treaty was concluded.⁸

In general, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials were careful not to jeopardize the prospects of better relations with the Philippines and did not interfere in the country's domestic affairs. However, at times they found it necessary to do so in order to promote parties and individuals which tended to identify with Israel. Thus for example, when the Philippines and Poland contested the balloting for the UN Security Council seat on 10 October 1955, Israel decided to vote against the Philippines. By doing so Israel hoped to undermine General Carlos P. Romulo who was notorious for his hostility toward Israel. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry classified as 'top secret', Simke said: 'The general feeling here among those who are not too friendly towards Romulo is that the loss of the fight for the seat would be a welcome slap to Romulo's prestige.'⁹

Many Philippine officials resented Israel's negative vote. Although the Philippines' attitude toward Israel had gradually improved, officials in Manila feared the

consequences of overt rapprochement with Israel when the tension along the Israeli-Egyptian border mounted prior to the Suez Affair. Concerned about the reaction of its Muslim population, the Philippine government decided to delay the signing of the Treaty of Friendship. When the Israelis pressed the issue officials in Manila said that the time was not opportune in view of the tension in the Middle East.¹⁰ However, after several months of intense negotiations the Philippine government responded favorably and the Treaty of Friendship was signed on 26 February 1956.¹¹ When the question of the Palestinian refugees was brought to discussion in the General Assembly in the spring of 1956, Philippine Undersecretary Raul S. Manglapus reassured the Israelis that his government would maintain a neutral position on this topic.¹² Moreover, Israel was invited to take part in the Asian Games held in Manila that year.

Despite the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict reached a climax with the outbreak of the Suez Affair, Manila agreed to elevate the level of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This decision, made during Sharett's visit to Manila, triggered heavy criticism from both the Philippine and the Arab press. Press editorials lashed out at the government for expressing sympathy for Israel and for deciding to upgrade its relations with it at a very inopportune moment, when Egypt was involved in a war with Israel and its Western allies, Great Britain and France. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in the eyes of the local Muslims the Philippine government was an accomplice in a crime perpetrated by the forces of imperialism and Zionism against the Arab nation. Furthermore, Manila became a target of fierce criticism by all Afro-Asian states which adhered to nonalignment. Nevertheless, officials in Manila remained sympathetic toward Israel. The Philippines' President agreed to Israel's conviction that Nasser's ambitions were liable to lead to a crisis in the Middle East. He spoke enthusiastically of Israel's achievements, and expressed hope that his country could benefit from its technical know-how.¹³ In order to ward off further criticism from Arabs and all anti-Israeli elements the Philippine Vice President agreed that his country's relations with Israel be handled by the Philippine Ambassador to Rome.¹⁴ In May 1957, the Israeli Minister in Burma was sent to Manila, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on 9 August 1957. However, it was not until 1960 that Israel had a resident minister in Manila. At the same time the Philippine government made an attempt to pacify the Arab states without offending Israel. In a statement to the General Assembly on 23 September 1958, Secretary Felixberto M. Serrano said,

As for the more recent crisis, we have every reason to hail the decision of the Arab states themselves to shoulder the primary responsibility for stability and peace in the region...we remain vastly encouraged by the mounting evidence of good faith among the Arab nations in their relations with one another.¹⁵

Philippine government officials were by no means unanimous in their attitude toward Israel. While the President and the Foreign Minister were sympathetic to Israel the Philippine delegate to the UN remained consistently anti-Israeli.¹⁶ A Philippine legation in Israel was not established until Senator Gil J. Puyat pressured the government to allocate money for that purpose.¹⁷ Muslim reaction to Philippine-Israeli rapprochement had acted as a deterrent on Manila's decision to open a legation in Israel. When the

founding of an Israeli-Philippine Friendship Society was being discussed in the spring of 1960, Senator D. Alonto who represented the Muslim population in Mindanao objected bitterly saying that he would oppose Manila's treaty of friendship with Israel in the Senate. Consequently, the treaty's ratification was shelved.¹⁸ In an effort to facilitate the signing of the treaty the Israeli Foreign Ministry made plans to invite Alonto to Israel.¹⁹ However, Arab diplomats exerted considerable pressure to keep the Philippines away from Israel and therefore the government did not approve the visit.²⁰ Nevertheless, the cooperation between the two countries continued in every field. The Philippine government demonstrated a keen interest in Israeli technical know-how. Thus for example, the Philippine National Science Development Board expressed interest in cooperating with the prestigious Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel.²¹

The bilateral relations remained steady and cordial and by January 1962, Golda Meir, who was on a tour to other countries in the area, stopped in Manila. President Diosdado Macapagal referred to the visit as a 'manifestation of amity and cooperative labors between our country and Israel'.²² The two sides agreed to cooperate in areas which included the development of agricultural settlements, model farms and water resources.²³ This visit elevated the bilateral relations to new heights and despite critical remarks from Arab officials and Muslims in the country the Philippine government took great pride in its relations with Israel. In a speech delivered on the occasion of the Near East International Fair, which opened in Tel Aviv in June 1962, Macapagal said that Israel was 'a miracle of progress in this space age' and that, 'We in the Philippines, which is a new nation, admire a great deal your phenomenal achievement in nation building.'²⁴ However, Golda Meir was less enthusiastic about the visit, which was similar to her other visits in Asia in that it lacked the vitality and the drama that she experienced in Africa.²⁵ Nevertheless, the good will between the two countries continued. On 1 January 1962, a Filipino Embassy was opened in Tel Aviv and Emilio Bejasa was nominated Minister. But the decision to open an Embassy in Jerusalem was not unanimously accepted in Manila. There were critics who believed that the decision deprived the Philippines of the opportunity to play an important role in the Middle East and there were those who were concerned about the negative impact that the connections with Israel would have on the Philippines' ability to benefit from the economic potential of the Arab states. There were even those who believed that by being too friendly with Israel the Philippine government was alienating not only the nonaligned Afro-Asian world but also millions of Muslims in countries close by. For example, in an article entitled 'Envoy Hits Choice of Jerusalem' a Philippine diplomat, who wished his name to remain anonymous, called the decision 'rash and unwise', adding that, 'We will lose the friendship of several nations in Asia and Africa, particularly those who attended the Bandung Conference of 1956—because Jerusalem is an international city—it would be interpreted by these nations that the Philippines considers Jerusalem as the exclusive territory of Israel instead of an international city.'²⁶ There was also fear in Manila that since the Philippines is a Catholic country the opening of an Embassy in Jerusalem might expose the Philippine government to pressure from the Vatican.²⁷

Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem were convinced that the Philippine government's hesitation and reluctance to open an Embassy in Jerusalem was not only a result of pressure applied by the Arab states but also by Washington.²⁸ A letter from the

Foreign Ministry to the Israeli Embassy in Manila stated,

We are aware of the United States' drive to dissuade foreign representatives from residing in Jerusalem, and to transfer those residing in the capital to Tel Aviv. The United States has respectable partners in this endeavour, however, so far we have not had any proof regarding the Vatican in this 'Holy War'.²⁹

Appreciative of Israeli expertise in warfare methods and munitions production, Philippine Defense Ministry officials demonstrated a keen interest in purchasing arms and munitions from Israel. In June 1962, the Philippine Defense Minister was invited to visit Israel for that purpose.³⁰ The Philippines' demand for arms added another dimension to the bilateral relations. Wishing to extricate itself from excessive reliance on the United States, the Philippine government became enthusiastic about the idea of purchasing arms from Israel. It is hardly surprising therefore that it continued to respond to Israel's needs with unusual alacrity. Thus for example, when asked to support the candidature of M. Avidor to the UNESCO council the Philippine Foreign Ministry immediately responded favorably.³¹ However, the Philippines' proximity to the nonaligned nations of Asia constituted a formidable obstacle to its relations with Israel. Manila was torn between its regional responsibilities, which demanded adherence to nonalignment, and its special relationship with the United States, which compelled it to befriend Israel. Israeli officials were aware of this dilemma and expressed concern that the Philippines' support of the Bandung Conference meant that Manila was not entirely favorable toward Israel. However, this proved not to be the case. The Israeli Minister in Manila reported regarding his impression on this matter, saying,

The Philippine policy is not anti-Israeli nor pro-Israeli. There is a great sympathy to Israel among the Philippine nation and its leadership. They are prepared to support us as long as the Israeli interests do not contradict the Bandung principles—at least the way they understand them.³²

British press reports commented that by warming to Israel the Philippines was exposing itself to hostility from much of the Afro-Asian bloc.³³ Such apprehensions, as it turned out, had no adverse effect on the bilateral ties. Israel became involved in helping the Philippines in land settlement projects, cattle breeding and various agricultural enterprises. It also agreed to assist the Philippines in developing atomic energy programs.³⁴

Tension in the bilateral relations occurred, however, in the summer of 1963, when an Egyptian airplane carrying 23 Filipinos crashed. The magazine *News Behind the News* published an article entitled 'Jews Blamed for UAR Jet Crash'. The Philippine Aviation Authority believed the allegation, which emanated from Bombay, that Jewish agents were behind the incident.³⁵ As it turned out, however, officials in Manila did not allow this incident to poison the bilateral relations, which by now rested on solid foundations. Israel's reputation as an advanced country with superlative technical expertise was such that the Philippines government could not afford to ignore it. Officials in Manila had constantly called upon the government to tap Israeli resources. Their criticism against the government mounted when President Macapagal, who was under considerable Arab

pressure, sought to be more cautious in his relations with Israel. Now that many Philippine officials became excited about the prospects of better cooperation with Israel it was difficult to reverse the trend and therefore his decision to maintain a low profile was not popular, particularly since he was the one to praise the Israelis for their achievements. In the autumn of 1963, Vice President Emmanuel Pelaez blamed President Macapagal for rejecting the Israeli government's offer of technical assistance for the development of water resources and settlements.³⁶ The Philippine government's hesitation in this matter was due to pressure exerted not only by the Arab states but also by neighboring Muslim countries. This was also the reason why the Treaty of Friendship was not ratified until December 1963.³⁷

That the bilateral relations did not deteriorate was due largely to pragmatic reasons. The Philippine government war against communists and Muslim extremists continued unabated. The Philippine government needed to devise new methods of counterinsurgency warfare and senior army officers began to explore the possibility of learning from Israeli military instructors. In a conversation between Allon and officials in the Philippine Defense Ministry, Philippine officials expressed interest in learning Israeli methods of warfare. General Alfredo Santos was authorized to contact IDF personnel. Philippine officers were aware of the operations carried out by the IDF and some of them were familiar with their Israeli counterparts. For example, Santos had known Rabin personally since the days when they had participated in a course designed to teach the use of new warfare methods.³⁸ Moreover, Israel's involvement in training Singapore's armed forces had greatly impressed the Philippine officers, who sought closer cooperation with the IDF.

By the mid-1960s, the cooperation between the two countries had expanded to numerous fields. The agreements signed covered joint ventures in institutes of higher learning, trade procedures and the opening of an El Al office in Manila.³⁹ At last, in 1965, President Macapagal announced the signing of the Treaty of Friendship.⁴⁰ The bilateral relations reached such a high level of cordiality that when a Philippine delegation was invited to participate in a regional convention, the Philippine Foreign Minister reassured Israeli officials that its members would strongly oppose the raising of the issue of 'Palestine' in any form and would object to any decision detrimental to Israel's interests.⁴¹ However, the bilateral relations continued to be marred by Arab interference. President Nasser's speeches, which portrayed Israel as a menace to peace in the Middle East, had considerable impact on Muslim public opinion in the Philippines and the neighboring countries. Arab and Muslim diplomats sought to capitalize on the anti-Israeli sentiment among the Muslims in the Philippines and to persuade the government to maintain a distance from Israel. In a letter to the designated Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines the outgoing Ambassador wrote:

The tendency of the Foreign Ministry's top echelons is normally to support us and to help. Whenever it is possible to do so quietly, support is immediately provided, however, immediate pressure is exerted by the Arabs (who are represented here by the UAR alone) or by the ambassadors of Indonesia and Pakistan, then the recoil and the desire to avoid complications are obvious.⁴²

Ties with the Philippines continued to loom large in Israel's foreign policy agenda. In a letter to the Israeli Ambassador to Manila, Eban said, 'I want you to know that I attach significance to Manila as an observation point on the events in Asia in general and to the deepening of Israel's ties with that continent in particular.'⁴³ Yet there was much more to do in order to solidify the bilateral relations. In February 1966, the Israeli Ambassador in Manila reported his impression regarding the state of the bilateral relations. He argued that commercial treaties were virtually nonexistent between the two countries; that the technical agreement according to which Israeli experts were supposed to come to the Philippines to establish model agricultural settlements had not materialized; and that the agreement to cooperate in the atomic field had not yielded substantial results.

When the issue was discussed in the Israeli Foreign Ministry some argued that there were many foreign experts in the Philippines and there was not much that Israel could contribute. The Israeli Ambassador explained that the recent pro-Arab vote of the Philippines in the General Assembly should not come as a surprise to Israel. The tendency to promote better relations with the Arab states was due not only to the fact that Israel did not have much to offer in the technical field but also to the new line in Philippine foreign policy, which emphasized normalization of relations with Asian countries neighboring the Philippines, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. This was the very reason why the Philippine Ambassador said that 'the Arab-Israeli dilemma is a headache which the Philippines should keep away from'. At the same time, the Israeli Ambassador lamented the fact that 'the high echelon of the foreign ministry is unfriendly to us'. Israel's willingness to help the Philippines was an important factor which encouraged much good will in Manila. However, Israel had its limits and could not offer much to the Philippines. Unlike Burma or South Africa, the Philippines could rely on foreign aid from its neighbors and even more so from the United States. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Israeli Ambassador suggested that Israel minimize the talk about technical assistance because any such assistance would be no more than a 'drop in the ocean' compared to the enormous assistance in manpower and money given by the Chinese nationalists and the Japanese, not to mention the dimensions of US aid which Israel was in no position to match. The Ambassador suggested that the existing cooperation continue and that Israel increase the purchase of items such as sugar and lumber from the Philippines and sell citrus, fertilizers and pickled vegetables. He also recommended that Israel continue to invite Philippine politicians who could serve as propaganda agents.⁴⁴ By 1966, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were pessimistic regarding the bilateral relations. On 5 September 1966, the Israeli Ambassador in Manila informed the Foreign Ministry that due to lack of technical assistance and the cool and sometimes hostile attitude on the part of the Philippine Foreign Ministry, 'all we can do is to establish good relations with a few influential people so that we would be able to enlist their support at the appropriate time'.⁴⁵ This was in line with Israel's *modus operandi* in other Asian countries that resisted normalization.

The Philippine government's fear that a close association with Israel would have an adverse effect on its relations in the Afro-Asian bloc continued to act as a deterrent. In a telegram to President Ferdinand Marcos, who came to power in 1966, a group of Philippine leaders from the south warned against 'committing the Philippines to any offer which the Israel government might initiate on pain of isolating the Philippines from the

Afro-Asian Bloc'.⁴⁶ Consequently, the Philippine delegation in the United Nations voted in favor of resolutions censuring Israel. When the ad hoc Political Committee of the General Assembly adopted a draft resolution recommending the appointment of a custodian over absentee property in Israel the Philippines was among the states that voted for it. Displeased by the decision, Eban asked Narciso Ramos to reconsider that vote.⁴⁷

Despite its voting pattern in the United Nations the Philippine government was pragmatic enough to promote the bilateral relations and the two countries continued to cooperate. Convinced that cooperation with Israel could help him maintain some measure of independence from US influence, Marcos sought to intensify the contacts. Moreover, facing domestic enemies he regarded his country's association with Israel as a great asset, particularly since Israel was capable of providing him with technological and military assistance. In 1967, the two countries reached an agreement to expand the areas of cooperation, combat the vestiges of colonialism and promote progress. The bilateral relations reached a new level of cordiality such that even the Arab defeat at the hands of Israel in the Six Day War did not lead to a serious crisis. Despite its anticipation of strong criticism by the Arab states, the Philippine government decided to vote against the Yugoslavian-sponsored resolution in the United Nations, which required Israel to withdraw from all the occupied territories. Indeed, the Philippine vote triggered an angry response from Cairo and the Egyptian Ambassador threatened to reassess his country's decision to sell rice to the Philippines. He also said that his government might change its mind regarding its consent to admit Philippine students to study in Egypt.⁴⁸ Responding to a joint Israeli-Philippine communiqué made by Eban and Ambassador Ramos, the Egyptian Ambassador said that the Philippines must refrain from accepting Israeli aid. Unlike the response of other Asian and African nations, which yielded to Arab pressure, the Philippines' response was quick and bold. Ramos was reported to have told the Egyptian Ambassador not to interfere in Philippine-Israeli relations.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Marcos regime was well aware of the limitations of his country's foreign policy, which had to be in line with the countries of the Afro-Asian bloc. In a statement in the General Assembly on 25 September 1967 Ramos said:

The Philippines maintains friendly relations with the Arab states and with Israel, and sincerely hopes that peace based on justice will soon be established in the area. The Philippines supports the efforts and decisions of the United Nations to solve the problems brought about by the hostilities. We are grieved by the sad plight of the refugees...we share the general concern for the preservation and protection of the holy places in Jerusalem...[we] cannot condone any territorial gains achieved by force of arms...we must equally insist upon the establishment of conditions that would guarantee the political and territorial integrity of all states in the area.⁵⁰

Israel's swift victory in the Six Day War astonished the Philippine army, whose senior officers admired the Israelis and sought to learn military lessons from the IDF.

The Philippine Defense Ministry demonstrated keen interest in establishing defense settlements similar to those built in Israel by Nachal units where soldiers were engaged both in combat and in agricultural work. Thereupon, the Israelis began intensifying their

involvement in the Philippines. In the summer of 1968, there were reports that Israeli officers were sent to train the Philippine armed forces in counterinsurgency and commando raids.⁵¹ In addition, the Israel-Philippines Friendship League encouraged voluntary activities on the country's behalf. In November 1972, it shipped medical supplies to flood victims in the Philippines.⁵² The cooperation between the two countries continued in earnest during early 1970. When Israeli athletes were barred from sporting events in Asia, the Philippines facilitated their participation. In addition, Manila and Haifa were declared sister cities.⁵³ Israel had also been cooperating with Xavier University in the Philippines in agricultural and water projects and the Philippines began learning from Israel's experience in establishing efficient cooperatives.⁵⁴

That the bilateral relations were not seriously damaged by events such as the Six Day War or the subsequent Yom Kippur War was largely due to the fact that the Philippines is an island state which was to a large extent removed from events on the Asian mainland. Also, the Philippines was not in the Soviet orbit and, like Israel, it maintained close ties with the United States. However, the militant Muslim residents in its most southern island were a constant threat to peace in the country. Supported by Libya, these dissidents remained unruly and wrought havoc in rural areas. The encouragement which the Arab states gave to the Muslim dissidents riled the Marcos regime and caused considerable tension in Philippine-Arab relations.⁵⁵ Marcos was not particularly concerned with Libya's leader Colonel Mu'amar Qaddafi's obsession with the Palestinian cause. However, he criticized him for supporting the Muslim insurgents in the Philippines. In addition, Marcos blamed the radical regime in Algeria for inflaming Muslim sentiment in his country. As the Muslim counterinsurgency intensified in the Philippines more Arab countries became involved.⁵⁶ In addition to help that the insurgents obtained from the Arab governments, various private institutions and individuals in the Arab world contributed generously. These included the Muslim World League in Mecca, Darul Ifta in Riyadh, the Islamic Solidarity Fund in Jeddah, Al-Awqaf in Kuwait, the World Islamic Call Society in Libya and the Ba'th Party in Syria.⁵⁷

Despite his anger with the Arab states, Marcos was not in a position to ignore Arab public opinion due to his country's dependence on oil from the Middle East. Above all, Marcos was anxious to secure Arab cooperation in his attempt to suppress the Muslim uprising. Torn between Arab pressure to distance himself from Israel and US pressure to maintain that connection he kept a low profile and gave little publicity to his contacts with Israel. Nevertheless, the bilateral relations with Israel were not entirely unaffected by these events. Marcos found it imperative to show greater solidarity with the Arab states. Shortly after the Yom Kippur War he declared that if Israel did not withdraw from the Arab territories it conquered in 1967 the Philippines might have to reconsider its relations with it. He also spoke about the need to restore the rights of the Palestinian people and stated that his country's position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict remained neutral.⁵⁸ Marcos persisted in his tendency to conduct a more even-handed policy in the Middle East. Thus for example, in an Afro-Asian Writers Symposium held in Manila in early 1975, he read a message by Sadat attacking Israel for its 'arrogance' and for its 'Zionist racist conceit'.⁵⁹ By the end of July 1977, a PLO delegation led by Farouk el-Kadoumi, head of the organization's political department, arrived in the Philippines. However, despite all these declarations and the hearty welcome given to the PLO

members the contacts between Israel and the Philippines did not cease. Marcos's mother Josefa arrived that very month in Israel for the third time. By then, the Philippines had become even more keenly interested in Israeli technology. Philippine academic and technological institutions asked to cooperate with their Israeli counterparts. Many Philippine women came for community leadership training at the Mount Carmel International Training Center. The cooperation between the two countries expanded to the military field as well. This was mainly a result of the intensifying guerrilla activities of the Muslim insurgents, which forced Marcos to send his wife Imelda to meet Qaddafi and to persuade him to cease his support for the Muslim insurgents. In one of her letters Imelda explained the purpose of her mission and the reason for Marcos's desire to maintain connections with Israel. She wrote,

Fredy sent me to see Ghaddafi because thirty thousand Filipinos, both Christians and Moslem, were already dead. JUSMAG [Joint US Military Advisory Group] wouldn't arm us so we'd gone to Israel to get arms, which is why Israel gave us so many national honours and awards.⁶⁰

In addition to lessons on methods to combat guerrilla warfare the Philippine government asked for Israel's help to foil hijacking and expressed interest in purchasing the Israeli-made Kfir fighter bomber; however, the plan did not materialize due to Washington's objections.⁶¹ By the end of 1977, both sides decided on exchanging trade missions.⁶² In March 1978 the Israeli Air Force intercepted a Philippine jet flying over the Sinai but the pilots were immediately released. Exposed to criticism by the Arab states, Marcos was compelled to hide the nature of its contacts with Israel. Reports that the Philippine armed forces were using Israeli equipment were denied immediately. Thus for example, when Muslim rebel leader Nur Misuari argued that the Philippine government was using Israeli-manufactured aircraft against Muslim rebels in the southern Philippines the government was quick to dismiss what it called 'false accusations'. Air Force Major General Samuel Sarmiento said, 'We have never had nor do we have any Israeli-built airplane in our inventory.'⁶³

The news regarding Sadat's intention to embark on peace negotiations with Israel was well received in Manila. For the first time the Philippine regime felt free to interact with Israel without incurring the wrath of many Arabs. On 3 September 1978, Marcos conferred the Philippines' highest ceremonial award, the Order of Sikatuna, Rank of Datu, on Israel's outgoing Ambassador Shlomo Seruya and welcomed the new Israeli Ambassador, Moshe Raviv. During 1978, the Philippines sold Israel US\$4 million-worth of merchandise, which included wood, coconut products and decorative articles. At the same time the Philippines imported US\$6 million-worth of goods from Israel. These included phosphates, chemicals and machinery. By the end of 1979, the volume of trade between the two countries had doubled and they collaborated on joint ventures such as absorption of Vietnamese refugees.⁶⁴ The Israeli navigation company, Zim, had opened an agency in Manila and began operating a weekly service between the two countries. In addition, Israeli companies and agencies such as the State Comptroller's Office began helping the Philippines to establish efficient audit procedures. A contributing factor to the understanding between the countries was the involvement of Jews in Philippine affairs

and the toleration that the small Jewish community in Manila continued to enjoy.⁶⁵

The Marcos family continued to maintain close relations with Israel.⁶⁶ Imelda's references to Israel show both admiration and appreciation for its technological support.⁶⁷ One Israeli official was quoted as having said, 'She believes, apparently, that we have excellent ties in the business world here and we influence US Jews, who in turn influence the mass media and other institutions.'⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Marcos continued to maintain an image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In one of his instructions to Foreign Minister Romulo on 5 September 1978 he said:

In the discussion of this problem in the United Nations, the Philippine Delegation should continue to support Security Council 242 of 1967, and the complementary Resolution No. 338 ... We should support the principle that Israel should withdraw from all occupied Arab territories and for the recognition by the Arab countries of the right of Israel to national existence within secure and recognized boundaries...the Philippine delegation should extend support to Palestinian aspirations for self-determination.⁶⁹

On several occasions Marcos stressed his objection to the principle of occupation of territory by force.⁷⁰ However, he remained friendly to Israel, despite the fact that no real progress was made toward a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the cooperation continued in many fields. Economic Coordination Minister Ya'acov Meridor was reported to have concluded secret commercial deals with Imelda.⁷¹ In 1981, the Philippines' total trade with Israel amounted to US\$8,232,614. Exports amounted to US\$2,827,791 while imports totaled US\$5,404,823.⁷²

In 1982, an economic delegation was sent to Manila and in the same year Israel offered to sell arms to the Philippines.⁷³ There was also a report, which Israeli Foreign Ministry officials considered particularly damaging, that Israeli mercenaries and commando units operated in the country.⁷⁴ Cardinal Jaime Sin, Head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and one of Marcos's leading critics, paid a secret visit to Israel in April 1985. There was some speculation that the visit was linked to the opposition forces in his country but official sources insisted that the visit was entirely private.

According to press reports in Manila, the Israelis provided military training to a private army on Palawan Island in the Philippines. One source claimed that several hundred Filipinos were being trained there.⁷⁵ A private company of retired officers known as Tamuz Control Systems paid generous salaries to those officers interested in serving in the Philippines. This organization operated with the direct coordination of the Israeli secret services.⁷⁶ Eduardo Kogoangko, Marcos's 'untouchable crony' had a private army of mercenaries trained by Israeli commandos and supplied with M-16s, Uzies and Galil assault rifles. When Benigno Aquino took office Kogoangko fled the country with Marcos.⁷⁷ Israel's Ambassador to the Philippines, Uri Gordon, claimed that he did not know how the arms reached the Philippines or that Israel trained Kogoangko's forces.⁷⁸ However, although both countries denied such cooperation it is difficult to imagine that such large quantities of arms could have been shipped to the Philippines without the approval of the Israeli government.⁷⁹

Israel's military connection with the Philippines underwent a significant change with

the rise of Corazon Aquino to the presidency. President Aquino did not wish to follow Marcos's unpopular politics and therefore decided to maintain some distance from Israel. However, realizing that it could benefit from Israeli technical know-how the Aquino regime did not remain indifferent to Israel and in July 1986 it renewed its attempts to improve the bilateral relations. An official delegation headed by Luis Villafuerte and Aquino's brother visited Israel. Its members met Foreign Minister Shamir and asked for technical and scientific help. Shamir told the members that although Israel would not be able to provide major economic aid it would certainly provide technical assistance. He suggested that both countries collaborate with the United States on joint projects in which the latter would provide the necessary funds. Shamir had taken the opportunity to criticize the Philippine pro-Arab voting record in the United Nations in the last years of the Marcos regime.⁸⁰

In the autumn of 1986, Peres contacted Aquino and congratulated her on her efforts to 'democratize' the Philippines. Aquino sent a formal invitation to President Herzog to visit the Philippines. She explained her decision by saying that relations with Israel 'have always been friendly, but did not develop beyond the accepted level'.⁸¹ However, the visit did not take place due to unrest in the Philippines and the government's fear of Muslim reaction. This was the reason why no Israeli top-level visit to the Philippines had taken place since Golda Meir visited the country in 1961. Nevertheless, Aquino saw little harm in expanding the economic and cultural contacts. A tourism agreement between the two countries was signed and the Philippine Tourism Minister Jose Antonio Gonzalez expressed interest in opening direct air links between the two countries. The bilateral relations continued to improve and the leaders congratulated each other on their assumption of office.⁸² Representatives of the Aquino regime continued to maintain contact with the Israeli government and Eizenberg was involved in planning joint commercial projects.

Israel's support to the Philippines and its military involvement in the country triggered angry responses from opponents of the Aquino regime. Particularly vocal were the communist rebels who declared that they would attack Israeli targets if Israel continued to support Aquino's counterinsurgency program. There were speculations in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the communist rebels were probably responsible for planting a bomb in Israel's Embassy in Manila in February 1988.⁸³

The end of the 1980s ushered in a new period in the bilateral relations. The Philippine government began showing clear signs of evenness in its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was primarily the need to suppress the Moro National Liberation Front, (MNLF) and the Philippines' dependence on Arab oil which dictated a change in its relations with the Arab world. The fact that the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) had recognized the MNLF under Misuari's leadership as the sole and legitimate representative of Muslims in the Southern Philippines, with the status of observer, worried many officials in Manila who called upon the government to reassess its Middle East policy. Thus for example, Leticia Ramos Shahani, the Senate Chair on Foreign Relations, argued that despite the enormous importance of the Middle East to the Philippines' economy the government had done little to cultivate relations with the Arab states. She writes,

It should therefore not surprise us to learn that while Nur Misuari of the MNLF can see any Arab foreign minister any time at his convenience, our ambassadors find it extremely difficult to make an appointment with the foreign minister after the ceremonial presentation of the open copy of their letters of credence. How did it come to pass? There are no easy answers to this unfortunate situation. But there are some glaring indicators of our diplomatic lapses for which corrective measures are urgently needed.⁸⁴

Senator Shahani went on to argue that the Philippine government had committed a few serious errors such as its decision to close the Moroccan Embassy in Rabat. She argued that ignoring the importance of King Hassan II, the 37th direct descendant of the Prophet, custodian of the holy places and founder of the OIC, was a serious error that tarnished the Philippines' image in the eyes of the Muslim world. Moreover, she said that there was a need to balance the Philippines' presence in the conservative Arab countries by opening an Embassy in Syria. She also called for increasing the Philippines' presence in the Persian Gulf region by opening an Embassy in Bahrain. As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, she argued that since all Muslim organizations and many countries recognize the Palestinians' right to self-determination the Philippine government should be more definite and clear in its support for the Palestinians. This, she insisted, did not mean that the Philippines' relations with Israel should be jeopardized.⁸⁵ Summarizing the lesson that the Philippine government should learn from the Gulf War, Shahani said,

We must move closer to the Arab members of the OIC and ask for their cooperation in the development of the Southern Philippines... We must support efforts for the resolution of the PLO-Israel conflict... On the other hand, we must support the right of Israel, a democratic and progressive country, to exist in the Middle East...should there be a UN-sponsored peace-keeping operation in the Middle East, the Philippines should strive to be a member in those areas where non-Arabs are welcome.⁸⁶

The progress in the Middle East peace negotiations was highly praised in Manila. The emergence of the United States as the sole global power in the Middle East following the fall of the Soviet Union and the decline of Pan-Arabism helped improve the bilateral relations. Occasional remarks which criticized the Philippines' policy toward Israel continued to appear in the press, particularly when the peace process in the Middle East appeared to slow down as a result of Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank. Yet the bilateral relations rested on firm foundations and the Philippine government did not seem willing to alter its policy toward Israel. Even the Intifada did not seem to endanger the bilateral relations. The Muslim media have been particularly active in giving publicity to the events in the West Bank and Gaza, often magnifying their proportions and describing them as atrocities committed by the Israelis against the innocent Palestinian people. It would appear, however, that this campaign has little effect on the Philippine government. The lack of concerted Arab efforts characteristic of the early years to dissuade Manila from dealing with Israel is evident. Given the tremendous opposition to the regime and their need for technical know-how and military assistance, neither Aquino nor Fidel Ramos was willing to abandon the country's relations with Israel. Occasional remarks

about Israel's intransigence and lack of sincere efforts in the peace process were made by Philippine government officials. However, the criticism was meant primarily to silence the Muslim opposition and to ward off Arab assaults.⁸⁷ So far, Manila has not shown any signs of willingness to let its relations with Israel deteriorate.

Israel's connection with the Philippines remained solid throughout the entire period. Despite the instability in the country the attitude of the regimes which came to power in the Philippines did not change significantly over the years. Manila's connection with the United States proved beneficial to the bilateral relations. However, Manila was not free from constraints which caused tension in the bilateral relations. To silence domestic and external opposition Philippine leaders were compelled not only to keep a low profile in their relations with Israel but also to denounce it occasionally and to vote against it in the United Nations. Formal procedures required that Israel complain about the Philippine record of voting in the United Nations, but officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry understood Manila's predicament. As previously mentioned, there were difficulties involved in maintaining ties with Israel. Why then did the Philippine government continue to maintain its ties with Israel in the face of so much opposition? From Manila's point of view, the risks of maintaining ties with Israel had substantially minimized in recent years. The Philippine government had less to fear from the reaction of other countries on the Asian continent. Those Asian countries which had long preached that imperialism and Zionism were linked had themselves come to terms with Israel. Even some of the Arab states which pressured the Philippine government to maintain a distance from Israel had recently come to terms with it. Furthermore, Israel's expertise in high-tech industries and in agricultural and military technology became assets which Manila could hardly afford to dispense with, particularly with the persistence of the Muslim insurrection in the country. It is difficult to imagine a significant worsening of Israeli-Philippine relations even in light of the recent disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is unlikely to deviate from the policy guidelines established by her predecessors.

NOTES

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 20. Ben Horin to Golan, ISA 3337/4, 3 January 1960.
 21. Garcia to Ilisar, ISA 3337/5, 30 September 1961; Shimoni to Israel's Minister in Manila, ISA 3337/5, 30 October 1961.
 22. Diosdado Macapagal, *A Stone for the Edifice: Memoirs of a President* (Quezon City, Philippines: Mac Publishing House, 1968), p. 293.
 23. 'Foreign Minister of Israel Makes Official Visit to the Philippines', *Department of Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1962), p. 57.
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 25. Medzini, *The Proud Jewess*, p. 285.
 26. Cited in a letter from Ilisar to Foreign Minister, ISA 3431/16, 3 March 1962.
 27. Eytan to Foreign Ministry, ISA 34331/16, 8 March 1962.
 28. Foreign Ministry to Israeli Ambassador in Paris, ISA 3431/16, 14 March 1962.
 29. Israeli Minister in Manila to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3431/16, 23 March 1962.
 30. Ilisar to Peres, ISA 3431/16, 22 June 1962.
 31. Hoffi to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3431/16, 10 July 1962.
 32. Ilisar to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3431/16, 3 January 1963.
 33. Berthold to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 164307, ER103183/1, 2 February 1962.
 34. 'Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy between Israel and the Philippines', ISA 3431/16, 23 May 1963.
 35. Ambassador in Manila to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3431/16, 14 August 1963.
 36. *Manila Times*, 23 September 1963.
 37. *Ha'aretz*, 18 December 1963.
 38. Shimoni to Peres, ISA 3581/3, 14 May 1964.
 39. Ranon to Ganor, ISA 3581/3, 8 June 1965.
 40. Bayne to Goodenough, PRO FO 371, 180860, ER103183/1, 1 March 1965.
 41. Embassy in Manila to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3581/3, 11 June 1965.
 42. Shalaf to Designated Ambassador, ISA 3581/3, 6 July 1965.
 43. Eban to Israeli Ambassador in Manila, ISA 4055/43, 10 March 1966.
 44. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4055/43, 14 February 1966.
 45. *Ibid.*, 5 September 1966.
 46. Israeli Embassy in Manila to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4055/43, 13 March 1967.
 47. Eban to Ramos, ISA, n.d.

48. Kidron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4055/36, 20 July 1967.
49. *Ibid.*, 16 March 1967.
50. Press Release, Republic of the Philippines, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila, pp. 9–10, ISA 4055/41, 25 September 1967.
51. *Strait Times Eastern Sun*, July 20, 1968.
52. *Jerusalem Post*, 21, 29 November 1972.
53. *Ibid.*, 29 June 1973; 6 November 1973.
54. *Ibid.*, 25 February 1973; 28 May 1973; 18 April 1975.
55. Claude A. Buss, *Cory Aquino and the People of the Philippines* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Alumni Association, 1987), p. 156.
56. By late 1982, three distinct Muslim groups had emerged in the Philippines. The main faction called Moro National Liberation Front led by Nur Misuari was supported by Libya and later by Iran. The Muslim Liberation Front led by Hashim Salamat was supported by Egypt, and the smaller Bangsa Moro National Liberation Front led by Dimas Pundato was supported by Saudi Arabia. Martin Wright (ed.), *Revolution in the Philippines? A Keesing's Special Report* (Essex: Longman, 1988), p. 15.
57. W.K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of the Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 161.
58. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 November 1973.
59. *Ibid.*, 2 February 1975.
60. Cited in James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy* (London: Granta Books, 1998), p. 343.
61. *Jerusalem Post*, 18 July 1976; 11 May 1977.
62. *Ibid.*, 10 October 1977.
63. *Ibid.*, 21 March 1978.
64. *Ibid.*, 10, 16 January 1979; 25 October 1979.
65. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1979.
66. *Ha'olam Hazeh*, 12 February 1986.
67. *Yediot Aharonot*, 11 December 1987.
68. Cited in Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection*, p. 29.
69. Foreign Minister Carlos P. Romulo, 'Instructions of the President', *A Watershed in Multinational Diplomacy* (Philippines: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1978), p. 3.
70. *UN Must Lead, Not Follow: Statements of Secretary of Foreign Affairs Carlos P. Romulo at the XXIX Regular Session of the UN General Assembly* (The Philippines: Department of Affairs, n.d.), p. 5.
71. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 December 1981.
72. *Marcos Diplomacy: Guide to Philippines Bilateral Relations* (Manila: Foreign Service Institute, 1983), p. 176.
73. *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 December 1982.
74. *Yediot Aharonot*, 15 April 1985.
75. *Bulletin Today*, 28 July 1985.
76. *Ma'ariv*, 18 November 1984.
77. *Washington Post*, 10 March 1986.
78. *Jerusalem Post*, 10 March 1986.

79. Sterling Seagrave, *The Marcos Dynasty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 286–7.
80. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 28 July 1986.
81. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 September 1986.
82. *Ibid.*, 25 November 1986; 17, 24 April 1987.
83. *Ibid.*, 17 February 1988.
84. Leticia Ramos Shahani, *Towards the Pacific Century: Essays on Philippine Foreign Policy* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 1989), pp. 63–4.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–9.
86. Shahani, *Towards the Pacific Century*, p. 119.
87. Opponents of Israel are not only the Muslims but also groups and individuals with anti-Semitic leanings. Thus for example, a leading daily in the Philippines claimed that the ‘Zionist Jews lied about the story of six million Jews dying in the Holocaust myth, invented by Hollywood’. The same report claimed that Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Edward Cassidy were Jewish and that the diaries of Anne Frank are fake. When confronted by Jewish officials, the editor responded by saying that the publication was an oversight.

Part IV
South Asia

India—In the Shadow of Nonalignment

Israel's attempts to gain India's sympathy and support remained futile for many years. It was largely due to its geographical position and its proximity to other heavily populated countries that India had a high priority on Israel's foreign policy agenda. Successive Israeli governments had made strenuous efforts to establish full diplomatic relations with India, whose officials remained cautious and kept Israel at a distance. It was not until the rise of Rajiv Gandhi as India's Prime Minister in October 1984 that Israel's efforts began to pay dividends. The persistence of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Palestinian dilemma were the main reasons for India's reluctance to upgrade its relations with Israel. Additional factors such as India's commitment to nonalignment, the pressure exerted by the Muslims in India and Israel's connection with Sri Lanka, were also responsible for the painstakingly slow process of normalization. Aware of India's predicament, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials did not relinquish hope that better relations with India were only a matter of time. It was clear at that time, however, that in their attempt to upgrade the bilateral relations Israeli officials had compelled the Indian government to choose between two alternatives: to support Israel and thereby alienate all Arab countries, or to secure Arab friendship by avoiding rapprochement with Israel.

The motives behind India's policy toward Israel remained pragmatic all along. A careful study of India's Middle East policy reveals that its behavior was dictated by national interest rather than by anti-Semitism or pro-Arab sentiments.¹ India's attitude toward the Arab states has been consistently friendly. Frequent expressions of sympathy toward the Palestinian Arabs, even prior to the establishment of Israel, were a testimony to India's commitment to their struggle for independence and statehood. At the same time, remarks condemning Zionist aspirations were frequently uttered by Indian officials, and the press was replete with articles equating Zionism with imperialism. Expressions of solidarity with the Arabs became more frequent during the interwar years, when Jews immigrated to Palestine and Arab resistance intensified. The Indian National Congress had sent numerous solidarity messages to the Arabs. While ignoring the Jews, it wholeheartedly supported the Arab struggle against the British imperialists. Following the outbreak of the Arab rebellion of 1936, Mohandas Gandhi clarified his position, saying:

The cry for a national home for the Jews does not have much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after a return to Palestine. Why should they not, like other peoples on the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood? Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today

cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct.²

Uninformed about the Jewish problem, Gandhi regarded the Jewish-Arab conflict in colonial terms. His knowledge about anti-Semitism and the goals of the Zionist movement were quite limited and the fact that Jews were being persecuted in Europe while struggling for a Jewish national home in Palestine did not enter his calculations. Hoping to inform Gandhi that the Jews were in dire need of a homeland, the prominent Jewish philosopher Martin Buber had written a letter to him explaining the predicament of the Jews and the Jewish connection to Palestine. It is doubtful, however, that Gandhi ever received the letter or that even if he had, he changed his views regarding this issue. Further attempts to convince Gandhi to adopt a pro-Zionist attitude were made by leading Zionists such as Judah Magnes, Jay Haynes Holmes, Sidney Silverman and others. Their arguments concerning the benefits of a rapprochement between the two countries and the constructive role that India could play in the Middle East fell on deaf ears in New Delhi.

India's pro-Arab trend intensified significantly following the British withdrawal and the formation of Pakistan in 1947. India's negative attitude toward Israel was largely determined by Jawaharlal Nehru's closest confidant, Maulana Azad, who was also the spokesman for over 40 million Muslims in the Congress Party's High Command. Having served as a senior member of the Indian Cabinet and as a cultural ambassador to the Arab states, Turkey and Iran, Azad was known for his sympathy for the Arabs and tenaciously exercised his influence to prevent rapprochement with Israel.³ Nehru adopted a similar attitude toward Israel and had expressed his sympathy for the Arabs while India was still under British occupation. In the First Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in the spring of 1947, Nehru stated unequivocally that 'Palestine is essentially an Arab country and no decision can be made without the consent of the Arabs.'⁴ When reminded by Zionist leaders that European Jews were in dire need of a homeland, Nehru insisted that the Arabs should not be the victims of the Jewish predicament. His attitude was similar to Gandhi's. Like his predecessor and mentor, Nehru's aversion to British rule led him to regard the Arab struggle in the same light as India's struggle for freedom.⁵ Soon after becoming a representative of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in May 1947, India, along with Iran and Yugoslavia, presented a plan calling for a federated state in Palestine with local autonomy for the Jewish and Arab units, and a limit on Jewish immigration.⁶ Sir Abdul Rahman, the Indian member of UNSCOP argued that partition was not a workable solution to the conflict,⁷ and when the Partition Plan was discussed on 29 November 1947, India's representative voted against it. He went only as far as stating that Palestine should be recognized as an independent state with autonomy for Jews in areas in which they constituted a majority.⁸ Following the War of Independence in which Israel emerged victorious, the Indian government supported the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in its efforts to help the Palestine refugees and continued to insist that they must be repatriated.⁹

Immediately after its establishment, Israel sought recognition from India. A telegram to that effect was sent by Sharett in June 1948.¹⁰ The lack of an immediate response from New Delhi prompted Israel to ask the British Foreign Office to pressure India to consider recognizing Israel. However, instead of providing a clear message to Israel the instructions from New Delhi to India House in London were that when inquiries were

made about this issue the reply given should be that 'India was watching the developments with interest'.¹¹ The conviction held by both Israelis and American Jews was that New Delhi could be tempted to upgrade its relations with Israel by a generous financial offer. They argued that recognition could be easily obtained if wealthy Jewish financiers were willing to embark on a major investment campaign in India. That this option was never pursued seriously was largely due to Israel's unwillingness to involve Jewish citizens in India in such an enterprise.¹² Besides, such action was liable to give validity to the notion, which in any case was prevalent at that time in India, that imperialism and Zionism were collaborating in a sinister scheme to suppress the downtrodden peoples of the Third World.

Nehru, who became India's Prime Minister following Gandhi's assassination in January 1948, decided to avoid a decision on the issue of recognition, kept a low profile and waited for further events to unfold. At the same time, however, some Indian officials had demonstrated a keen interest in agricultural and scientific cooperation with Israel. In a letter to Weizmann, officials in the Palestine Office for India asked that he pay attention to India's needs in such matters. They added that this 'may eventually serve as a stepping stone for initiating relations between the two countries which is of the greatest importance in view of the undeniable leading position India occupies in Asia'.¹³ Responding to proposals made by Israeli experts, the Indian Ministry of Agriculture began asking for immediate help in cooperative farming, intense cultivation and drilling wells. In addition, the Indian government asked Israel to provide scientific knowledge gained from experiments designed to produce artificial food for its growing population. However, Israel did not seem eager to respond to India's requests. Israeli officials expressed concern that any assistance that they could provide India would be 'like a drop in the ocean' and therefore would not be appreciated. Besides, the Israelis had made commitments to other much smaller Asian countries. The response from Jerusalem was not only that the experts were needed elsewhere but also that India's negative behavior as manifested by its refusal to recognize Israel and to support its admission to the United Nations did not warrant such a gesture. Furthermore, Foreign Ministry officials argued that the proposals regarding the experts 'originated on the Jewish side, and not from them'.¹⁴ Such a response was unlikely to lead to rapid improvement in the bilateral relations and despite the fact that a significant part of the Indian press favored recognition New Delhi did not see any reason to expedite the issue.

After UN Special Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte made proposals which modified the Partition Plan, the Indian government along with the Arab states voted against Israel's admission as a UN member. India's Chief Delegate M.C. Setalvad argued that his government could not recognize Israel because that country was created by force and not through negotiations.¹⁵ Moreover, Pakistan's efforts to create an anti-Indian pan-Islamic alliance with the countries of West Asia and the fact that influential Muslims occupied prominent positions in the Indian government and bureaucracy had further dissuaded New Delhi from recognizing Israel. The opposition to recognizing the State of Israel was often discussed in the Lok Sabha and Nehru was aware of the sensitivity of the Muslims regarding this matter.¹⁶ In addition, the Indian government did not wish to antagonize the Arab states and thereby lose its influence there. Arab efforts to dissuade India from recognizing Israel were unrelenting from the beginning. In response to Arab pressure, the

Indian government promised that it would not go beyond granting Israel *de facto* recognition. Seeking to ward off opposition, Indian diplomats explained to their Arab counterparts that *de facto* recognition was necessary in order to dissuade Israel from joining the communist bloc. Arab League spokesmen responded by saying that the conditions in Palestine were still unstable and urged India 'not to commit a mistake by recognizing Israel'.¹⁷ However, by 1949, the Indian press became favorable toward the idea of recognizing Israel. Many Hindus had sympathy for the pioneering Jewish state whose experiment with socialism they greatly admired. In the spring of 1950, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha Party passed a resolution demanding immediate recognition of Israel. Arab response was immediate and furious. The Arab Higher Committee contacted India's Minister Ataf Ali Ashghar Fadi in Cairo, asking whether the rumors regarding India's imminent recognition of Israel were true.¹⁸ Consequently, an adviser in the Indian Embassy in Hungary informed the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the Indian government wanted to recognize Israel but was compelled to delay the recognition out of consideration for the Arab states.

When asked whether India delayed its recognition out of consideration for Pakistan, an Indian diplomat said candidly that his government took Arab opinion very seriously. Similar statements were made by other Indian officials who participated in the debate over recognition. According to India's Ambassador in Cairo, Sardar K.M.Pannikar, the Indian government did not wish to alienate Egypt, which maintained a position of honest broker in the Indo-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir.¹⁹ In a letter to Nehru, Israel's Minister in Brussels complained that India's refusal to recognize Israel was unjustified. Nehru's excuse was that his government intended to recognize Israel but the lack of trained diplomatic personnel stood in the way.²⁰ And when confronted by Eilat on the same issue, Nehru explained that India must be extremely careful not to antagonize its 30 million Muslims and that it must deal with the issue with great caution. Nehru's delay in this matter stemmed primarily from his fear of being regarded as an opportunistic and mercurial leader. This becomes evident from his correspondence with his confidantes. In his letter to Frances Gunther, he argued that India did not wish to recognize Israel immediately because it had been claiming all along that the Jews were collaborating with the British in an attempt to dominate the downtrodden peoples of the Third World. He said that the Indian government had changed its views on this matter but did not wish to be regarded as opportunist and fickle by suddenly changing its attitude toward the Jewish state. Shortly afterwards, however, he stated that the recognition of Israel could not be delayed indefinitely.²¹ Long debates in the Lok Sabha ensued and the appeals from the press became more frequent. Politicians became increasingly involved in the arguments over Israel's recognition. Particularly vocal were the left-wing parties whose members admired Israel's experiment with socialism. Pointing to the enormous human resources and the talents of the Israelis, spokesmen for the Socialist Party argued that India could benefit greatly from immediate recognition.²²

Despite its reluctance to grant recognition, India was far from harboring hostility toward Israel. India's vote in favor of the internationalization of Jerusalem in January 1950 disappointed the Israelis but did not lead to overt hostility between the two countries. This was partly due to Nehru's ability to show some degree of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli dispute as demonstrated by the cautious approach of India's representative in

the United Nations. For instance, when Egypt interfered with Israeli shipping in the Suez Canal in September 1950, and the Security Council passed a resolution calling upon Egypt to desist from such actions, India abstained. At the same time the Indian government announced its willingness to participate in an economic organization whose purpose was to assist the Arab states.

Between Israel's formation in 1948 and its recognition by India in 1950 Nehru made several statements suggesting that the Indian government was becoming receptive to the idea of recognition. On 27 February 1950, he announced that India would soon recognize the Jewish state and several months later an Indian government official stated that India could no longer ignore an obvious fact. At last, on 18 September 1950, India announced its decision to grant Israel *de jure* recognition while promising that its ties with the Arab states would not be adversely affected as a result.²³ Furthermore, the Indian government made it clear that its recognition did not imply support for Israel's position regarding the boundaries.²⁴ Although India approved the nomination of an Israeli consul in Bombay it criticized Israel for using force and for altering the flow of the River Jordan. Seeking to allay Arab fears that its recognition of Israel was a prelude to full diplomatic ties between the two countries, the Indian government explained that its decision to recognize Israel was a calculated move designed to enable it to maintain a mediating role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is possible, however, that India's recognition of Israel at that time was a result of tension in Indo-Egyptian relations caused by Egypt's unexpected abstention in the UN Security Council on a matter of vital importance to India.²⁵

While recognizing Israel the Indian government maintained a low profile in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the same time, however, officials in New Delhi reiterated that India's relations with the Arab states would remain cordial; when debates about Palestine took place in the UN, Indian delegates voted for the Arabs but refrained from sponsoring resolutions or making amendments. In addition, press comments about the Indo-Israeli connection remained restrained. As it turned out, the decision to recognize Israel was well received by the Indian public and overall the press was favorable.²⁶ However, Israel's hope that recognition would be the first step in a long and fruitful relationship remained unfulfilled and by the summer of 1951 a sense of pessimism prevailed in Jerusalem. The Indian socialists were too slow in taking any interest in Israel while the right-wing parties cared about Israel only as a partner in an anti-Muslim front, and when Eytan arrived in New Delhi in late February 1952, his visit was briefly mentioned in the press with no editorial comments.²⁷ Israeli Foreign Ministry officials attributed India's reluctance to upgrade its relations with Israel to four factors: (a) the existence of a large Muslim minority in that country; (b) India's desire to establish a third Asian bloc into which it wished to attract the Arabs; (c) lack of objective information on the Middle East; and (d) India's quest for neutrality.²⁸

Commenting on Eytan's visit to India, the British Ambassador in Tel Aviv said that the Israelis were interested in establishing closer relations and if possible an exchange of diplomatic missions. He added, 'They are concerned at the collusion between Arab and Asian states at the United Nations General Assembly and also by Pakistan's support for Arab policies and the mystifying Mufti of Jerusalem.'²⁹ In his speech to the Indian Council of World Affairs in March 1952, Eytan said that there was ground for better relations with Israel because India never persecuted Jews. Besides, he said that there was

close resemblance between India's policy of nonalignment and Israel's policy of nonidentification.³⁰ What kept the countries apart was not only India's traditional sympathy for the Arab states but also the fact that there was widespread ignorance among Indians about the State of Israel. For example, during Eytan's visit one Indian official described Israel as 'a state based on theocracy'.³¹

In May 1953 the Indian government agreed that an Israeli consul be stationed in Bombay but did not send an Indian representative to Israel. This diplomatic change was not as significant as the Israelis had hoped. Officials in New Delhi continued to act as if India had never recognized the Jewish state and repeatedly referred to it as Palestine.³² Moreover, Israelis who wished to obtain an Indian visa were still required to file an application with the British Embassy. Indo-Israeli relations remained confined to cultural, scientific, agricultural and other matters of marginal importance.

In an effort to widen its cooperation with India, Israel sent representatives to attend cultural events in Asia such as the Conference of Asian Socialist Parties, which held its meetings in Rangoon at the beginning of 1953. Attending this conference were Sharett and the Director of the Histadrut's Political Department, Reuben Barkatt. The only outcome of this meeting as far as Israel was concerned was a rapprochement with Burma. India had yet to upgrade its relations with Israel.³³ Commenting on the results of this meeting, the Israeli Consul in Bombay complained that Indian officials did not receive him cordially.³⁴ At the same time, India's relations with the Arabs reached a climax when the Indo-Arab Society was formed in October 1954. Nevertheless, not all signs from New Delhi were discouraging. In 1954, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry had noted with satisfaction that India, along with Burma and Ceylon, pressed for Israel's participation in the Bandung Conference.³⁵

What kept Israeli Foreign Ministry officials optimistic about the future of the bilateral relations was the lack of consensus among India's political parties regarding the policy that New Delhi should pursue toward Israel. In a letter to President Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the All-India Hindu Raj Party expressed full support for Israel, which it regarded as a 'beautiful island of freedom'. The party's General Secretary L.G. Thatte said that he decided to spread this idea and to pressure Nehru to change his pro-Arab policy. At the same time, numerous pro-Israeli articles and editorials appeared in the Indian press. Their writers criticized Nasser for his attempts to portray Israel as an aggressor.³⁶ In addition, Indian Jews began their pro-Israeli campaign and the Central Jewish Board in Bombay appealed to Nehru to refrain from supplying arms to Egypt.³⁷ These efforts, however, remained futile. There were no signs of change in New Delhi's attitude toward Israel and Indo-Egyptian cooperation intensified.

In a letter classified 'very secret' the Israeli Consul in Berlin reported to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem that the Indian Air Force was planning to send a few officers to train Egyptian officers. Syria was also reported to have expressed interest in the project. In September 1955, an Indian military mission headed by the Chief of Staff visited Egypt. Another mission headed by the Indian Air Force commander visited Egypt in February 1956. These events caused great concern in Jerusalem. Unwilling to cause a serious rift in the bilateral relations the Indian government sought to placate the Israelis. Sources close to Nehru stated that India's support for the Arabs was by no means unqualified because both countries were locked in a competition for the leadership of the neutralist camp.³⁸

Yet the tension in the bilateral ties was too obvious for the Israelis to ignore. That the Arabs interpreted Nehru's attitude as an expression of friendship toward them was in large measure due to his extraordinary ability to play the 'Israeli card' in order to earn their support. Pannikar had once admitted that India used Israel whenever it wished 'to beat the Arabs'. This astute diplomat added that Israel could not expect full diplomatic relations with India unless the Arabs decided to support the US-Pakistani camp and thereby antagonize India.³⁹

Sharett's visit to India as Israel's representative in the Second Asian Socialist Conference in 1956 did little to improve the bilateral relations. Unwilling to antagonize Nasser, the Indian government refrained from overt expressions of sympathy toward Israel. The only Indian official to visit Israel at that time was S.K.Patil, Minister of Transport and Communications. Yet the Indian advocates of rapprochement with Israel had consistently argued that better ties with Israel would have a salutary effect on India's ability to mediate in the Arab-Israeli conflict. They pointed out that many Indians admired the new socialist state and that their country could benefit from Israel's technological achievements, especially in agriculture. Moreover, they argued that better ties with Israel would earn India handsome dividends in the West and among the powerful Jewish community in the United States.

Moved by pragmatic considerations, Indian officials felt compelled to deny that their government was contemplating the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.⁴⁰ However, the pressure exerted by the Indian press in favor of overt ties with Israel was too formidable to ignore, leaving Nehru little choice but to occasionally demonstrate sympathy for Israel. Leading dailies and journals lashed out at Nehru's pro-Arab tendency. For example, the *Free Press Bulletin* blamed Nehru for abandoning Israel while *Vigil* and the *Free Press Journal* argued that Israel's strategic importance was such that it would be a grave mistake to ignore its existence.⁴¹

Nehru's attempt to demonstrate neutrality in the Arab-Israeli dispute manifested itself clearly at the Bandung Conference. When referring to the Zionist movement he used the term 'aggression' but at the same time he said, 'we ought to take into consideration the background of what happened in Palestine. We have to remember the tragic suffering of the Jews during World War II, the massacre of the Jews by the fascist Nazis.'⁴² However, this expression of sympathy was hardly enough to lead to better relations between the two countries. Israel's Western orientation came to be resented by many in India and even those who initially supported Israel for its Labor Zionist ideology had become disillusioned by the mid-1950s. For example, Chairman of the Indian Socialist Party Ram Monohar Lohia criticized what he called Israel's 'white mentality' and did not approve its support for the Atlantic Camp.⁴³ When India's Foreign Minister visited Egypt and Damascus in the spring of 1956, he said that his government was entirely sympathetic to the Arab states. He added that no diplomatic relations between Israel and India were imminent and that India would provide all the necessary help to the Arabs in any future conflict with the Jewish state.⁴⁴

Nehru's attempt to show neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict was less successful than he had hoped and India's attitude was often confusing to the Israelis. Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of coordination among Indian officials regarding their government's Middle East policy. While Krishna Menon was attacking Israel at the United Nations the

official statements from New Delhi were that the two countries were on good terms.⁴⁵ Contradictory statements made by Indian government officials were to remain a common feature of India's Middle East policy throughout the entire course of the bilateral relations.

The bilateral relations suffered a major setback as a result of the Suez Affair. What made Israel's invasion of Egyptian territory so unpopular in India was the fact that the action was carried out in collaboration with Great Britain and France. Given the fact that the British occupation was still alive in the minds of India's leaders the response was predictable. Even for those who did not subscribe to the notion that Zionism and imperialism conspired to dominate Third World countries, Israel's collusion with the Western powers provided evidence of its association with imperialism. Nehru referred to the invasion as an act of aggression and warned that 'if the foreign forces are not wholly removed from Egyptian territory, this will amount to a clear violation of the U.N. resolution'.⁴⁶

Some Indian officials argued that the Sinai Campaign had interrupted the normalization between the Jewish and the Arab states and thereby adversely affected the Indo-Israeli rapprochement. According to Menon, 'One had the feeling before Suez that some dialogue could have begun. The attack and the invasion of Sinai, the partnership in Imperialist war, killed it.'⁴⁷ The Suez Affair and the Israeli invasion of the Sinai Peninsula caused concern in India largely due to the pressure exerted by the Muslims in Pakistan. Consequently, New Delhi was pushed further into the Arab fold. As Menon said, 'we are in a difficult position because of Pakistan and our anti-Imperialist views. Pakistan does nothing but she makes anti-Israeli speeches... We have got Pakistan on our borders and we cannot go and create more enemies than we have at the present moment.'⁴⁸

The bilateral relations remained closely tied to the Arab-Israeli conflict and any attempt made by the Indian government to normalize relations with Israel continued to cause fury in the Arab world. Even cooperation in economic and cultural fields triggered fierce criticism from Arab quarters. For example, the announcement in the Indian press in late 1957 that Israeli aircraft would be landing regularly in Bombay triggered protest from officials in Cairo who blamed India for acting behind Egypt's back.⁴⁹ Yet even the Suez Affair did not prevent Nehru from pursuing a pragmatic policy toward Israel, and when confronted by his opponents and critics Nehru did not hide this pragmatism. In answer to a question at a press conference on 7 August 1958, he said that India's decision not to exchange diplomatic representatives with Israel was based upon practical considerations and was not a matter of high principle. Yet his high regard of Arab nationalism as a powerful force was detrimental to his country's relations with Israel. In one of his speeches he said that although India sought friendship with all countries, 'our sympathies are with the Arab countries and with Arab nationalism'. On another occasion he said, 'Any settlement in Asia must have the good will and the cooperation of the Arab nation.'⁵⁰

Shortly before the Sinai Campaign, India's Foreign Minister met the Egyptian Ambassador in New Delhi and reassured him that India would prevent its clients from selling arms to Israel.⁵¹ India's Ambassador in Damascus had quoted Nehru as saying that an embargo on the sale of arms to the Middle East would harm the Arabs and help

Israel. Even Nehru's vision regarding the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict shows a pronounced pro-Arab bias. Nehru favored a gradual return to Mandatory Palestine in which the special character of the Jewish community would be recognized. Another solution, in his opinion, was to exert pressure on Israel to repatriate the Palestinian refugees, pay them reparations and surrender the Negev and the Galilee to the Arabs. Nevertheless, pragmatism continued to dominate Nehru's thinking and all statements made in his meetings with Israeli officials were carefully worded. For example, in his meeting with Sharett he admitted that after India recognized Israel it planned to establish diplomatic relations with it but every time he hoped to do so something intervened.⁵²

As Indian diplomats saw it, the Arabs loomed far larger than Israel on India's foreign policy agenda simply because they had more representatives in the United Nations, and India needed Arab support there at least as long as the conflict with Pakistan persisted. Another factor that had an adverse effect on the bilateral relations was that Israel had little to offer India in those days in terms of economic resources or even technical know-how. India's dependence on Arab oil and Egyptian cotton and the fact that many Indians were employed in Arab countries, especially in the Gulf region, discouraged Nehru from upgrading the ties with Israel. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Israel remained marginal in Indian foreign policy calculations. Yet India's pro-Arab policy did not go unchallenged. The criticism manifested itself not only in the press but also in formal gatherings. Thus for example on 27 March 1957, an Indian MP, Professor A.R. Wadia, said in the Lok Sabha that perhaps India should pressure Egypt to adopt a 'more reasonable attitude toward Israel'.⁵³ However, despite the fact that many Indians sympathized with the Zionist enterprise and admired Israel's rapid pace of development the government did not take any initiative to expand the cooperation between the two countries. Nehru's position was that India's political and security interests had to be given high priority on the national agenda. The fact that the Indian government did not establish full diplomatic relations in the early days of the Arab-Israeli conflict made it increasingly difficult to exchange diplomatic envoys without antagonizing the Arabs. Nehru continued to exercise great caution in an attempt to portray a facade of neutrality. On one occasion he said, 'After careful thought, we feel that while recognizing Israel as an entity, we need not at this stage exchange diplomatic personnel.'⁵⁴

As far as Israel was concerned the message was clear: India was hopelessly pro-Arab and therefore would reject all attempts at rapprochement. Ben Gurion criticized Nehru for trying to portray an image of neutrality while persisting in his anti-Israel bias 'in spite of his promises to the representatives of our Foreign Ministry'.⁵⁵ In an interview with Moshe Pearlman, Ben Gurion said that Nehru's reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with Israel was a personal disappointment for him and that he remained skeptical about India's ability to play a role of arbiter in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁵⁶ Nehru persisted in his tightrope-walking policy toward the Middle East by portraying an image of a neutral and honest broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He continued reassuring the Arab states of India's friendship while maintaining a distance from Israel and avoiding hostile remarks. When Nasser visited India in the spring of 1960, Nehru praised Egypt's 'gallant resistance' against the invasion by Great Britain and France but did not mention Israel.⁵⁷ While it discouraged the Israelis, Nehru's attitude pleased Nasser and Indo-Egyptian relations seemed to have reached the peak of their cordiality. Heikal boasted

that Nasser's relations with Nehru had prevented any possibility that Israel would ever be capable of upgrading its relations with India. He informed his readers that when the Israeli Consul prepared printed materials to be distributed in the city during Nasser's visit in India, he could not find a single Indian willing to perform this function for him.⁵⁸

Despite the crisis in the bilateral relations which followed the Suez Affair, Israel persisted in its attempts to improve relations with India through cooperation in other fields. In 1961, Gideon Rafael was sent by the Foreign Ministry to the annual conference of the World Health Organization, which convened in Delhi. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials had strongly believed that this conference would provide Israel with the opportunity to overcome the Arab-sponsored ostracism and to improve the bilateral relations.⁵⁹ Rafael conducted negotiations with several Indian representatives at the United Nations, and he met Menon and Nehru's sister. However, little progress was made. The small Israeli consulate dealt with marginal matters such as trade and culture and had no power to negotiate with the Indian government on political matters.⁶⁰ By the beginning of 1963, there were clear signs that the bilateral relations had taken a turn for the worse. This had to do with the Chinese invasion of the previous year. The Israeli Consul in Bombay wrote to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, 'the new political situation created in India with the Chinese invasion of October 20 compels us to reassess the character of method of our action in India in the future'.⁶¹ Pleased with Nasser's mediating efforts in the Indo-Chinese conflict, Nehru found it appropriate to maintain a distance from Israel. When asked by the Canadian Foreign Minister why India's relations with Israel had cooled off, the Indian Defense Minister mentioned the resistance of the Muslim population in India and the fact that Egypt supported India in the Colombo negotiations regarding the Sino-Indian conflict.⁶² The *Times of India* editor had once explained why Israeli-Indian relations did not move forwards, saying:

India-Israel relations are a subject which has never caught the public imagination and the whole question will remain a dead issue unless something happens or is done to activate and stimulate the undoubted goodwill towards you that exists among a great many Indians and makes it into a burning question—in other words something worth putting up fighting for [*sic*].⁶³

While Golda Meir served as Israel's Foreign Minister the contacts between the two countries remained limited and indirect. Israel's diplomatic campaign to win India's good will was conducted mainly in the United States but there were direct contacts as well. Aware of Nehru's special relationship with Nasser, Ben Gurion sought to use his services as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For instance, in a letter dated 13 May 1963, he asked Nehru to use his influence in order to dissuade Nasser from dangerous adventures in the Middle East.⁶⁴

Indo-Israeli ties had additional dimensions not mentioned by the governments or in their official communiqués. The most important dimension was the military. During the Indo-Chinese conflict in the autumn of 1962, Golda Meir gave her approval to the sale of small munitions to India. However, seeking to avoid a conflict with Pakistan, she was reported to have refused to sell arms to India during the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1965. Journalists had later argued that the deliveries of 81-mm and 120-mm mortars and

howitzer artillery pieces continued to reach India during the conflict with Pakistan. During the Six Day War, India reciprocated by providing Israel with badly needed spare parts for the Israeli Mystere and Ouragan fighter aircraft and the AMX-13 tanks.⁶⁵ Officials in New Delhi were not oblivious to the fact that Israel was compelled to deny the sales due to fear of Pakistani hostility. By the same token, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials were aware of India's difficulties and the negative impact that overt relations with Israel could have had on New Delhi's ties with the Arabs.

The tragedy of Indo-Israeli relations was that until the end of the century India had no compelling reasons to consider Israel worthy of the risk of alienating the Arabs. Israel's superior military technology, which benefited many Third World countries, did little to improve the bilateral relations. While the Arabs could offer oil, cotton and their numerous votes in the United Nations, Israel had no essential commodity which could bind India in a vital relationship. Even Israel's ability to supply weapons did not play an important role in bringing the two countries together, since India produced its own arms in addition to the arms it obtained from the Soviet Union. Israeli arms sales to India remained modest until the late 1970s and did not become significant until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

By mid-1960, there were numerous comments in the Indian press regarding the ties with Israel. Among the writers were prominent politicians such as Morarji Desai who called upon his government to establish relations with Israel.⁶⁶ However, Shastri, who became India's Prime Minister after Nehru's death, had shown clear signs that his primary aim was to seek rapprochement with the Arab states. Shastri's fear was that in the coming nonaligned conference in Algiers the Arabs would support China and Pakistan against India.⁶⁷ A British official in New Delhi explained why it was so difficult for India to upgrade relations with Israel, saying: 'One difficulty about appearing interested in anything to do with Israel is that one risks provoking scurrilous criticism from the well-drilled cohorts of Arab diplomats in New Delhi.'⁶⁸ Indeed, Arab pressure on the Indian government not to upgrade its relations with Israel was relentless.⁶⁹ Yet many Indians questioned the wisdom of maintaining cordial relations with the Arabs at Israel's expense and the number of editorials commenting on this issue had increased considerably by the middle of the decade. Some of the writers argued that India did not earn handsome dividends from its relations with the Arab states and said that by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel the government could benefit from its technical know-how and act as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁷⁰ Critics of New Delhi's Middle East policy had convincing arguments that could barely be ignored. Indeed, apart from the occasional support which India obtained from the Arab states, as it did from Nasser in the Kashmir conflict, the Indian government did not feel that its pro-Arab policy earned it handsome dividends. Yet it did not reverse its pro-Arab policy for fear of losing Arab support in its struggle against Pakistan. Such was the impression of Knesset MP Yohanan Bader who visited India in the spring of 1966. According to Bader, India's anti-Israel policy, as determined by Menon, was unlikely to change because most MPs were concerned that the Arab states would support Pakistan in the United Nations.⁷¹ This, however, did not prevent critics such as M.C. Chagla, the Muslim Foreign Minister of India from criticizing his government for being more pro-Arab than the Arabs themselves.⁷²

A study of Israeli-Indian relation reveals that even in those days there was considerable potential for better relations between the two countries. Neither the small size of the Jewish state that managed to survive against all odds nor its socialist character would suffice to explain the good will which many Indians had toward Israel. It was primarily the Arab states' failure to reciprocate India's support that led to greater sympathy for Israel among the Indian public. The Arabs had disappointed the Indian public on at least three occasions, in 1962, 1965 and 1971: they did not rush to support India during its conflict with China in 1962—while Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia showed some support for India's claims, Syria, Iraq and Egypt proposed mediation; during the Indian-Pakistani conflict in 1965, the Arab states were clearly supportive of Pakistan, with even moderate states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia giving full support to Pakistani claims. Only Nasser's intervention prevented a condemnation of India's policy. In the Casablanca Conference held on 17 September 1965, Pakistan and India were called upon to settle their dispute according to UN principles. This feeling of frustration led many Indians to resent the pro-Arab policy of the Indian government, yet New Delhi did not reassess its Middle East policy. When Israel's President Zalman Shazar visited Nepal in March 1966, and stopped in India on his way he was not welcomed by Indian government officials. When Israel protested, New Delhi's response was that while it recognized Israel its decision was determined 'by our traditional friendship with the Arab states'.⁷³

During the Six Day War, the Indian government adopted a firm pro-Arab policy. After Nasser blocked the Strait of Tiran and removed the UN Emergency Force from the Egyptian border, Israel appealed to the United Nations. India's representative at the United Nations argued that there was no need for an emergency meeting of the Security Council, saying, 'The situation on the ground, while potentially dangerous, is still not clear; therefore, an urgent and immediate discussion is unwarranted.'⁷⁴ Shortly following the outbreak of the war India, along with France, suggested a plan to link the cessation of the hostilities to a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces to their prewar positions. On 13 June 1967, the Soviet Union asked the Security Council to adopt a resolution condemning Israel's aggression against the Arabs and demanding an immediate withdrawal. India, along with Bulgaria, Mali and the Soviet Union were the only members supporting the motion, which failed to obtain a majority. Moreover, India joined Yugoslavia in excluding Israel from a developing countries tariff agreement.⁷⁵

During the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1971, the Arabs had shown once again that their ultimate solidarity was with Muslim Pakistan. Even then no reassessment of India's Middle East policy had taken place. Yet the Indian government was aware of the fact that it could benefit from Israeli technical know-how. Prior to the Yom Kippur War Indian scientists discovered that Israeli technology could help them reclaim the desert and sought to adopt the Israeli *acacia tortilis* tree.⁷⁶ Indian scientists believed that Israel was the only country capable of providing them with assistance in desert reclamation in Rajasthan and hoped that the cooperation in agricultural projects would continue, but while New Delhi saw benefit in technical cooperation with Israel its official line did not change.

Israel's involvement in the Yom Kippur War distanced India even further. Yet the Arab attempt to use oil as a political tool was not well received in all quarters. Thus, for

example, the Hindu nationalist paper *Motherland* said in one of its editorials that the postwar rise in oil prices was nothing more than 'a blatant exercise in arm-twisting and it is poor nations like India, and not the affluent U.S.A. which will be squeezed dry in the process'.⁷⁷ However, India's dependence on Arab oil had considerably silenced the pro-Israeli voices, and India's anti-Israeli attitude manifested itself in many areas, including sports. In 1975, India banned the Israeli team from participating in the tennis championship that opened in Calcutta on 6 February 1975. Instead, a PLO team was allowed to play. Years later, India still refused to allow Israeli athletes to participate in the Asia games. In 1977, India's new Foreign Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced that his government ruled out the early establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, stating that, 'India is committed to the resolutions adopted by the UN that Israel must vacate all Arab territory... Secondly, the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people must be restored. That is the view of the new government.'⁷⁸ It is ironic that later, during Vajpayee's incumbency as Prime Minister, India was exceptionally keen on strengthening its ties with Israel even though it did not withdraw from all Arab territories. This was a result of pragmatic considerations, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Vajpayee's statement contradicted earlier statements in which it was said that rapprochement with Israel was being considered. The reason for these contradictions was that Vajpayee was in the opposition when he called for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. This call was in line with his Hindu nationalist Janah Sangh Party. However, since his party merged in January 1977 with the Janata People's Party that won the elections in March that year, he was compelled to speak as a representative of the national government. Desai, who became India's new leader, was no less pragmatic. Upon his rise to power he received a congratulatory note from Rabin who said that he was looking forward to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Desai responded that India would establish ties with Israel as soon as peace was achieved in the region. In his discussions with diplomats Desai admitted that India should have established diplomatic relations with Israel. However, he argued that this mistake 'cannot be remedied now' and in a meeting with Indian diplomats in South-East Asia he said that in principle he was all in favor of relations with Israel but he insisted that Israeli withdrawal from Arab land must be preceded by an agreement.⁷⁹

Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao stated that in early 1978 Dayan visited New Delhi and requested diplomatic relations but was turned down because some Muslim countries protested and pressured India to close the Israeli consulate in Bombay.⁸⁰ Like her predecessors, India's new Prime Minister Indira Gandhi refrained from improving her country's relations with Israel. All indications were that New Delhi's commitment to the Palestinians intensified. In a message to Arafat, she reiterated her government's support for the Palestinians and gave full diplomatic status to the PLO mission in New Delhi.⁸¹ However, despite her sympathy toward the Palestinians she was pragmatic and did not lose sight of India's national interests. The official statements of the Indian government were highly critical of Israel but the cooperation between the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and its Mossad counterpart did not come to an end.⁸²

Golda Meir and her successors in Israel's Labor Party continued to hope for better understanding with India. Peres seemed much more optimistic than Golda Meir regarding

the future of the bilateral relations.⁸³ He had noted that India was becoming increasingly neutral in the Israeli-Arab conflict. However, the much hoped for change had to wait until Indira Gandhi's demise.

The persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict continued to mar the bilateral relations. Events such as the Temple Mount incident and Israel's invasion of Lebanon left the Indian government in the unenviable position of having to denounce Israel. India discouraged an anti-Israeli procession in Kashmir but the anti-Israeli rhetoric did not cease. Shortly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, India declared the Israeli diplomat Yosef Hasseen *persona non grata* and expelled him from the country after accusing him of unacceptable interference in India's domestic affairs. This action came in the wake of his statement that India was competing with Pakistan in being anti-Israeli.⁸⁴ Indira Gandhi continued to attack Israel on every occasion. In meetings of the nonaligned nations she joined Fidel Castro and other Third World leaders in attacking Israel's policy toward the Palestinians and argued that the Jewish state was established in order to solve a problem that existed in Europe.⁸⁵ Yet despite the criticism from New Delhi, trade with Israel had increased 60-fold between the late 1960s and the late 1980s. According to an Israeli Commerce Ministry official, India's exports to Israel, which amounted to no more than 3,000 rupees (US\$2,400) in 1963-64, increased to more than 188 million rupees (US\$15.05 million) in 1984-85.⁸⁶

Indira Gandhi's assassination on 30 October 1984 ushered in a new period in the bilateral relations. Free from old shibboleths that influenced the attitude of his predecessors toward Israel, Rajiv Gandhi proved capable of embarking on a fresh course in India's relations with Israel. Unlike previous Indian leaders he was free from the notion that Israel was a tool and an agent of imperialism whose objective was to suppress the peoples of Asia and Africa. Nor was he as devoted to nonalignment in foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi led India into an era of rapprochement with the Western democracies. His conviction that democratic socialism was not the answer to India's problems eased India's ties with the West and his firm conviction that technology and modernization were essential to India's development had a great impact on India's foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi had great appreciation for Israel's technical know-how and military prowess. For instance, when the Indian intelligence services needed to provide him an armed guard they were told to consult Israeli security experts. However, the Indians had often resented the operations of the Israeli intelligence services. In January 1986, articles in the Indian press claimed that the Israelis were involved in a pro-American espionage ring. A high official in Rajiv Gandhi's government, Rama Swaroop, was criticized for helping to arrange Dayan's meeting in New Delhi in 1978, for lobbying for the opening of an Israeli consulate in New Delhi and for providing Israel with information regarding India's political situation.⁸⁷ There was tension in the economic field as well. In July 1986, Israel rejected India's application to join the World Federation of Diamond Bourses. Moshe Schnitzer, President of the Israel Diamond Exchange said that Israel opposed India's admission because of the restrictions it imposed on Israelis. However, despite the restrictions India's diamond industry, which had an annual turnover of US\$1.1 billion and employed 300,000 workers, did much business in Israel. A month later, officials in the Israel Diamond Exchange denied that India's application was ever rejected.⁸⁸

Tension in the bilateral relations mounted again in the spring of 1986, when Rajiv

Gandhi complained that Israel was collaborating with Pakistan in the war against the Tamils.⁸⁹ Herzog's visit to Sri Lanka in the autumn of that year had further increased the tension and the damage seemed beyond repair. By early 1987, the bilateral relations seemed to have reached their nadir. According to a London-based magazine, in February 1987 Israel offered India assistance in destroying Pakistan's nuclear reactor but India turned down the offer. The same source argued that Israel offered to sell India electronic devices in order to fight terrorism.⁹⁰ All efforts exerted by Israeli Foreign Ministry officials to promote better understanding with India seemed futile. Not only did India reject Israel's overtures in the political sphere but also in other areas of possible cooperation. It was only after considerable pressure from Jewish organizations and the Jewish Anti-Defamation League that India allowed the Israeli Davis Cup tennis team to play against the Indian team. However, Iran and the Arab League condemned the decision, and this pressure led the Indian government to go as far as barring Israeli tourists from visiting India.

The prospects for better relations seemed as bleak as ever with the rise of the right-wing Likud government in Israel. The Indian government was displeased with Shamir's hard-line policy toward the Palestinians and expressed its disapproval of his methods of suppressing the Intifada. However, far more profound changes began to take place toward the end of the 1980s, allowing Rajiv Gandhi to reorient his country's foreign policy with greater ease. The thaw in the Cold War and the Soviet-American dialogue lessened the hostility that many nations harbored toward Israel. Rajiv Gandhi witnessed Egypt's renewed friendship with the Arab states after the anger caused by the Camp David accords subsided. Egypt's renewed acceptance in the Arab world was a clear signal to Rajiv Gandhi that rapprochement with Israel would not be harmful after all. The lessening of Arab opposition to contacts with Israel became evident everywhere. When neighboring Sri Lanka cooperated with Israel in many fields, including the military, there was no resistance or protest from the Arab states. Similarly, the contacts which Israel managed to create in states such as China, Turkey, Oman, Qatar and others, triggered little resistance from the Arab states.

Rajiv Gandhi's meeting with Peres in the General Assembly at the end of 1985 marked the beginning of high-level contact between the two countries. In addition to his changing perception of the newly emerging world order of the late 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi was under considerable pressure from American Jews and particularly from representatives of the Anti-Defamation League who severely criticized his government for its anti-Israel policy. The pressure on Rajiv Gandhi had increased considerably by the end of 1988, when the US Congress was debating whether or not to decrease aid to India from US\$35 million to US\$60 million. The pressure exerted by personalities such as Congressmen Stephen Solarz and Morris Abrams, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, was such that the Indian government did not wish to antagonize Washington. By early 1989, Giora Brecher was nominated Israel's Consul to Bombay. Cooperation on security matters has helped the process of rapprochement as well. The fear that Pakistan was in the process of developing weapons of mass destruction was a major concern to the Indian government when the reports that the Israelis expressed willingness to cooperate with India on a joint venture aimed at bombing the nuclear site in Kahuta, Pakistan, continued to circulate.⁹¹ India's decision to host the Davis Cup

tennis competition in July 1987 marked another turning point in the bilateral relations. The Israelis were no longer denied entry into the competition. In addition, the Indian government removed the restrictions that Israelis had to face when trying to obtain a visa.

As it turned out, the road to normalization was more treacherous than even the most pessimistic officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry could have imagined. The persistence of the Intifada was a source of embarrassment to India and threatened to bring the rapprochement between the two countries to a screeching halt. Criticism in the Indian press that the 'iron fist' policy pursued by Israel was sheer oppression triggered heavy response from Israeli leaders. Moreover, the comment made by Israel's Ambassador Benjamin Netanyahu in the Security Council that Israel's handling of the Intifada was far superior to the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by India's forces triggered an angry response from New Delhi. The Indian government accepted the proclamation of the new State of Palestine declared by the PLO in Algiers on November 1988, and referred to Arafat as the President of the new state. The persistence of the Intifada led the Indian government to refuse to allow its team to play the Israeli team in the Davis Cup tournament in the spring of 1988.

There were further obstacles in the normalization process. The opposition Muslim parties were ready to use the Israeli connection in an attempt to embarrass the Congress Party. Rajiv Gandhi, who was involved in a serious financial scandal with the Swedish Bofors Company, feared that he was losing popularity. Moreover, Israel's continued involvement in Sri Lanka was not viewed with favor in New Delhi. Nor did India approve of Israel's aggressive diplomacy in Oceania. Particularly irritating in New Delhi's eyes was Israel's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who came to power in Fiji in late 1987 after overthrowing a democratically elected government.

Rajiv Gandhi's successor, V.P.Singh, who came to power in November 1989, desperately needed Muslim support for his newly formed government and therefore avoided making any decision on Israel. The next government led by Chandra Shekar was in a similar position. It was left to Narasimha Rao, who came to power on 21 June 1991, to conclude the normalization process. Rao cooperated in what he regarded as a humanitarian task by allowing Israel to investigate the killing of one of its citizens who had been touring Kashmir. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials began visiting New Delhi. By the end of 1991, an intense press campaign favoring diplomatic relations with Israel was underway. India's favorable vote in the UN General Assembly's resolution, which repealed a previous resolution equating Zionism with racism, was another quantum leap in the normalization process. At last, on 29 January 1992 Rao's government announced its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. This decision constituted a revolution in the diplomatic history of both countries and was regarded as one of the major triumphs of Israeli diplomacy in Asia. However, this could hardly have been achieved without a long and hard lobbying campaign waged by US officials.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries came shortly after China normalized its relations with Israel. It is ironic that after numerous statements made by officials in New Delhi that rapprochement between the two countries was contingent upon Israeli evacuation of all Arab land that a spokesman for the Indian government announced that India's decision was not tied in any way to the Middle East

peace process.⁹² Some observers believe that India's need to compete with China rather than the collapse of the Soviet Union was responsible for this change. The gain was obvious for both countries in the political arena but much less so in the economic. Following the establishment of relations between the two countries there was a sense of optimism that trade with India would increase but there were concerns as well. There was fear that India might not be the appropriate market for Israeli goods. As one observer, André Lumbroso said, 'India is interested in importing heavy equipment which we do not sell, and it is interested in selling cheap, poor quality manufactures we do not want to buy' The same author raised the specter that Israeli key industries such as diamond and electronics might suffer from strong Indian competition.⁹³

In the spring of 1993, Peres met Rao in India. The two leaders agreed to expand the economic cooperation between the two countries. India agreed to mediate between Israel and the Muslim countries of South-East Asia. They also raised the possibility of a joint action against terrorism.⁹⁴ A leading Pakistani newspaper reported that since 1979 India had purchased US\$100 million-worth of military hardware through a third party and that by the early 1990s India became interested in much more sophisticated technology which included computers and electronic devices in order to upgrade arms which India already possessed.⁹⁵ What stood in the way of more efficient transfer of Israeli technology to India was the inefficiency of the Indian state bureaucracy. As Major General Partap Narain put it, 'Israel offers joint ventures. Unfortunately, our government's red tape is enough to deter any entry into the hi-tech field.'⁹⁶

In 1995, India and Israel intensified their cooperation in the military field. The Indians expressed interest in obtaining Israeli help to upgrade their obsolete arsenal of MiG-21 aircraft, which they had obtained from the Soviets in the past. Commander of the Israeli Air Force Major General Herzl Bodinger visited New Delhi; however, the Indian government denied that any arms deal was discussed.⁹⁷ In addition, Indian scientists demonstrated keen interest in Israeli high-tech products.⁹⁸ According to *Jane's Defense Weekly*, India purchased US\$14 million-worth of light munitions from Israel. Israeli firms supplied the Indian navy with its only aircraft carrier, the INS *Viraat* with upgraded electronic warfare equipment. In addition, it supplied India with two Super Dvora Mark II attack boats and upgraded its tanks.⁹⁹

Indian sources said that Prime Minister Vajpayee was very impressed by the Turkish-Israeli military ties. Therefore, he decided to expand his country's defense cooperation with Israel to the fields of production of weapon systems, satellite development and exchange of intelligence. At the same time, officials said that they were concerned that the United States might interfere to prevent the arms sales and try to keep the two countries apart.¹⁰⁰ In the autumn of 1998 there were additional reports that Israel had sold munitions, patrol boats and electric warfare computers to the Indian navy. The Israeli companies El-OP, Tamam and Tadiran upgraded about 1,500 of India's T-72M1 tanks. India's Ambassador Ranjan Mathai confirmed that India purchased military equipment from Israel.¹⁰¹ In July 2000 the London-based *Asian Times* reported that India had begun negotiating with Israel to purchase vehicles and aerial surveillance equipment to be used on the Kashmir border.¹⁰² The Israelis were highly concerned about the US\$2 billion cooperation agreement which they had with India. Therefore, when rumors emerged that the Indian peacekeeping forces helped the Hizbollah capture three Israeli soldiers in south

Lebanon, Israeli officials denied the accusation.¹⁰³

The establishment of diplomatic relations with India has been a major goal of Israeli foreign policy for many years and was undoubtedly one of its crowning achievements. This was primarily due to India's stature as a leading country in the Afro-Asian bloc whose members had persistently waged an anti-Israeli campaign since the early days of the Jewish state's existence. What prevented an early rapprochement between the two countries was the fact that India's founding fathers tended to equate their country's predicament with that of the Arab states. Nehru admitted on more than one occasion that India's sympathy for the Arabs stemmed from their common experience with colonial rule. That India's leaders were incapable of normalizing relations with Israel was largely due to their attachment to Mohandas Gandhi's worldview in which Zionism and imperialism were interconnected. Even Nehru's strong sense of *realpolitik* did not liberate him from the views of his mentor. While appreciating Israel's value to India, Nehru remained a prisoner of his mentor's heritage. At the same time, however, he remained remarkably pragmatic and his tightrope-walking Middle East policy kept India on friendly terms with the Arab states without seriously alienating Israel.

As it turned out, the revolution in the bilateral relations had to wait much longer than the Israelis had hoped. India's leaders had enormous constraints to overcome. The persistence of the Indo-Pakistani conflict acted as a formidable constraint on New Delhi's freedom of action in the Middle East. Moreover, Muslim domestic resistance and India's commitment to nonalignment had forced New Delhi to maintain a distance from Israel. What allowed India to bring the bilateral relations to the surface was a favorable set of circumstances which emerged after Rajiv Gandhi's rise to power. Free from his predecessor's socialist and nonaligned mentality, Rajiv Gandhi was willing to improve relations with the Western democracies. The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Middle East peace process further eased the rapprochement with Israel. Both Arab and Muslim resistance to rapprochement diminished considerably. Rajiv Gandhi and his successors came to realize that normalizing relations with Israel was not as risky as their predecessors had believed. Fortunately, even the staunchest anti-Israeli among Indian leaders did not fail to appreciate Israel's value. This was largely due to the fact that the bilateral relations expanded into numerous areas, including the military. The mere fact that New Delhi's official statements remained anti-Israeli for most of the Jewish state's years of existence did not bring the bilateral relations to an end. What made it possible to upgrade the bilateral relations was the very fact that there were solid foundations for a dialogue from the outset. Yet the upgrading of the bilateral relations had to wait for the much-improved international climate of the late 1980s, which left the United States as the main global power and ushered in a new period of dialogue in the Middle East.

Undoubtedly, the establishment of full diplomatic relations with India was a major triumph of Israeli diplomacy in a major Asian country. Israel's ability to normalize relations with India marked the end of an era in which nonalignment was a major tenet of Indian foreign policy. Furthermore, normal relations with India seem to have helped pave the way for greater understanding between Israel and other countries in the region. The normalization process contributed to Israel's acceptance in Pakistan and other Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Whether the establishment of full diplomatic

relations with India will stand the test of time remains to be seen. India's leaders showed time and again a keen sense of pragmatism and did not allow the violence in the Middle East and the failure of the peace process to harm the bilateral relations.

NOTES

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2. P.A.Mendes-Flohr, *A Land of Two Peoples* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 108.
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5. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: John Lane, 1945), p. 617.
6. Meir, *My Life*, p. 209.
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Indian government officials continually argued that the Partition Plan was a serious mistake. Thus for example, India's Vice President Zakir Hussein stated that India wholeheartedly supported the Arabs on the question of Palestine, that the Arabs should not pay for Jewish misfortune and that 'the partition of Palestine was a great mistake'. *Free Press Bulletin*, 31 May 1965.
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14. Panjabi to Cynowicz, ISA 2555/5, 26 February 1949; Natoo to Weizmann, ISA 2555/5, 7 August 1949; Comay to Weizmann, ISA 2555/5, 12 June 1949.
15. *The Hindu*, 13 May 1949.
16. Eytan, *The First Ten Years*, p. 169; Meron Medzini, 'The State of Israel and the Asian Nations', unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 1960), pp. 51–2; *India: Legislative Debates* (19–31 August 1948), Vol. 6, Part I, p. 381.
17. *Hindustan Times*, 18 September 1950; 'Indo-Arab Exchange of Notes over Israel's Recognition', ISA 2555/8, 1 December 1949.
18. Lahiry to Pollack, ISA 2555/8, 7 December 1949; resolution passed at the 28th Session of the Akhil Bharat Mahasabha, Calcutta, ISA 2555/8, 6 March 1950; *Al-Ahram*, 6 February 1950.

19. Gainossar to Shimoni, ISA 2555/8, 16 March 1950; Gourgey to Sharett, ISA 2555/8, 26 March 1950.
20. Amir to Nehru, ISA 25558/8, 17, 23 May 1950.
21. Nehru to Gunther, ISA 2558/8, 26 June 1948; conversation between Eilat and Nehru, ISA 2555/8, 25 May 1950.
22. Extract from the Report of Rammanohar Lohia, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee, Socialist Party, India, ISA 2558/8, 8–12 July 1950; *Hindustan Times*, 1 September 1950.
23. Indigram from the Officer of the High Commissioner for India, Public Relations Department, India House, London. Press Release No. 1558. ISA 2555/8, 18 September 1950. At that point the press comments about the recognition were favorable for the most part. The most favorable comments were made in the following newspapers: *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *The Tribune*, *The Statesman*, *Indian New Chronicle*, *Searchlight*, *Bharat*, *Free Press Journal* and *Amritsar Bazar*.
24. *Hindustan Times*, 18 September 1950; *India and Palestine: The Evolution of a Policy* (New Delhi: Government of India, External Publicity Division, n.d.), p. 31; *India: Legislative Debates* (27 February 1950), Vol. 1, Part I, p. 495; *Hindustan Times*, 18 September 1950. For further discussion of India's recognition of Israel see P.R.Kumaraswamy, 'India's Recognition of Israel, September 1950', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January 1995), pp. 124–38.
25. The resolution was to invite a representative of Communist China to come before the Security Council in connection with the Korean conflict. India favored this proposal. *The Hindu*, 18 September 1950; see also Richard J.Kozicki, 'India and Israel: A Problem in Asian Politics', *Middle Eastern Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May 1958), p. 165, n15.
26. *Hindustan Times*, 18 September 1950; *Times of India*, 20 September 1950; *The Statesman*, 20 September 1950; *Hindustan Times*, 19 September 1950; *National Herald*, 19 September 1950.
27. Pollack to Shimoni, ISA 2558/8, 5 July 1951; Shimoni to Pollack, ISA 2558/8, 7 February 1952; Pollack to Shimoni, ISA 2558/8, 3 March 1952.
28. Foreign Ministry to Gazit, ISA 2558/8, 7 December 1952.
29. Evans to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 98800, ER1061, 26 February 1952.
30. Peck to Chadwick, PRO FO/371, 98800, ER1061/3, 11 March 1952.
31. Chadwick to Peck, PRO FO/371, 98800, ER1061/4, 2 April 1952.
32. Comay to Levin, ISA 2555/9, 24 June 1953.
33. According to Radio Damascus, India informed Iraq of its intention to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Foreign Ministry to Israel's Consulate in Bombay, ISA 2558/4, 7 December 1953.
34. Doron to Foreign Office, ISA 2558/8, 24 August 1953.
35. Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 79; George McTurnan, Kahin, *The Asian African Conference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 3.
36. Thatte to Ben Zvi, ISA 2558/8, 25 April 1953. During the Suez Crisis of 1956, Thatte announced that if other countries decided to send volunteers to help Egypt or any other Muslim nation against Israel the All-Hindu Raj Party would send 10,000

- volunteers to help Israel. 'Hindu Raj Party to Send Ten Thousand Volunteers for Israel', ISA 2558/7, 24 November 1956. Although the All-India Hindu Mahasabha did not make such outlandish statements it sympathized with Israel. 'Resolution Passed During the 32nd Session of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha at Jodhpur', ISA 2558/7, n.d.; *Indian Express*, 11 July 1955; *Free Press Journal*, 7 July 1955.
37. Central Jewish Board to Nehru, ISA 2558/4, 4 November 1955.
38. Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2558/4, 29 May 1956; 'Nasser and Nehru', ISA 2558/4, 4 June 1956.
39. *Al-Ahram*, 29 January 1954; Lewin to Israel's Consul in Bombay, ISA 2558/8, 5 May 1954.
40. *Bombay Times*, 9 November 1953; *Pakistan Times*, 9 November 1953.
41. *Ma'ariv*, 13 January 1955.
42. *Ibid.*, 21 April 1955.
43. *Deccan Chronicle*, 26 March 1956.
44. *Falastin*, 10 April 1956.
45. Israeli Consulate in New York to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2558/7, 29 November 1956.
46. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Indian Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches—September 1946–April 1961* (Government of India: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), p. 536.
47. Brecher, *India and World Politics*, p. 78.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
49. *The Statesman*, 17 December 1957.
50. Nehru, *Speeches*, pp. 414–15, 281, 283.
51. *Falastin*, 20 June 1956.
52. Yovel to Israeli Consul in Bombay, ISA 2558/7, 28 October 1956; Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2558/7, 30 October 1956.
53. *India: Legislative Debates*, Vol. 16 (27 March 1957), pp. 775–9.
54. Nehru, *Speeches*, p. 415.
55. *Asian Recorder* (New Delhi: 4–10 April 1959), p. 2, 594.
56. Moshe Pearlman, 'Ben Gurion Looks Back', in *Talks with Moshe Pearlman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 178; Medzini, *The Proud Jewess*, p. 264.
57. Prime Minister's Speech at the Civic Reception to President Nasser, New Delhi. ISA 3311/52, 30 March 1960; Elitzur to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3311/52, 6 April 1960.
58. *Al-Ahram*, 20 April 1960.
59. Gideon Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), p. 87.
60. *Ibid.* India continued to maintain a distance from Israel. Thus, for example, in March 1966, Israel's President Zalman Shazar was invited to visit Nepal. Shazar was scheduled to stop over in Calcutta (not New Delhi, the national capital). His reception by the Indian authorities was not cordial. See Joseph B. Schechtman, 'India and Israel', *Midstream* (August–September 1966), pp. 48–61.
61. Eilan to Shimoni, ISA 3402/1, 5 February 1963.
62. Herzog to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3402/1, 23 May 1963.

63. Cited in Eilan to Golda Meir, ISA 3402/1, 22 July 1963.
64. Ra'anana to Katz, ISA 3402/1, 17 April 1963; Ben Gurion to Nehru, ISA 3402/1, 13 May 1963.
65. Manoj Joshi, 'Uniform to Pinstripes', *India Today International* (6 April 1998), pp. 36–7.
66. Weekly Press Report No. 44/64, from 6 November 1964 to 12 November 1964. J. Mistry to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3540/7; *Times of India*, 5 May 1965.
67. Lewin to Evron, ISA 3540/10, 30 May 1965.
68. Furness to Goodison, PRO FO 371, 180862, ER103209/1, 30 June 1965.
69. Dafni to Foreign Minister, ISA 3540/10, 1 September 1965.
70. *Times of India*, 11 October; 4 December 1965; *Hindustan Times*, 12 October, 29 November; 6 December 1965; *The Statesman*, 30 November 1965; *Indian Express*, 30 November 1965.
71. *Hayom*, 8 May 1966.
72. Baljit Singh, *Indian Foreign Policy: An Analysis* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1976), p. 57.
73. *Hatzofe*, 23 March 1966.
74. Cited in Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 378.
75. *Jerusalem Post*, 13 February 1973.
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77. Cited in *ibid.*, 3 December 1973.
78. Cited in *ibid.*, 31 March 1977.
79. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1977; 17 June 1977; 4 September 1977; 3 January 1978.
80. *Ibid.*, 6 July 1980.
81. *Ibid.*, 25 January 1980; 30 March 1980.
82. P.R. Kumaraswamy, 'Strategic Partnership Between Israel and India', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May 1998), p. 2.
<<http://biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/1998/issue2/jv2n2a6.html>>
83. Shimon Peres and Haggai Eshed, *Tomorrow is Now* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1978), p. 293 [Hebrew].
84. Hasseen gave an interview to the Bombay-based *Sunday Observer* in which he said that Indian politicians deluded themselves into thinking that they could impress the Arabs. *Jerusalem Post*, 7 July 1982.
85. *Ibid.*, 1 August 1982; 8 March 1983.
86. *Ibid.*, 21 July 1987.
87. *The Hindu*, 9 December 1985; *Jerusalem Post*, 1 January 1986.
88. *Ibid.*, 1 July 1988; 4 August 1986.
89. *Ibid.*, 9 April 1986.
90. *Ma'ariv*, 22 February 1987.
91. *Sunday Observer*, 17 January 1988.
92. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 January 1992.
93. *Ibid.*, 6 February 1992.
94. *Ha'aretz*, 19 May 1993.
95. *Pakistan Observer*, 15 December 1993.
96. Partap Narain, *Indian Arms Bazaar* (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 1996), p. 220.

97. *Jerusalem Post*, 6 June 1995.
98. *Ibid.*, 30 January 1997.
99. *Ibid.*, 9 March 1998.
100. *Ibid.*, 24 May 1998.
101. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1998.
102. *Asian Times* (London), 11 July 2000.
103. *Middle East International*, 27 July 2001, p. 10.

Sri Lanka—The Tacit Connection

Israel's relations with Sri Lanka¹ operated on both overt and covert levels. A period of informal contact in the early 1950s was followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations which Colombo terminated twice. Yet both sides saw considerable benefit in maintaining contact. From Israel's point of view, cordial relations were deemed essential due to Sri Lanka's proximity to the world's most populated countries. Israeli policy-makers regarded Sri Lanka as a diplomatic base of operations in the Indian Ocean and a springboard to Oceania. Similarly, there were compelling reasons for Colombo's desire to maintain contact with Israel. The primary reason was Israel's expertise in the technical field, which turned it into an attractive ally. Even more compelling was Israel's ability to provide Sri Lanka with arms and military training. It was largely the perennial state of warfare between the Sinhalese and the Tamils which forced Sri Lanka to search for allies, particularly when these could contribute to its national security. The economic and military cooperation between the two countries continued almost throughout the entire period of the Jewish state's existence despite the instability and the changing status of the diplomatic relations. Undoubtedly, the instability had an adverse effect on the bilateral relations. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka's leaders had demonstrated a keen sense of pragmatism and called upon Israel to provide military assistance when it was needed.

Sri Lanka's relations with Israel were most unstable and the diplomatic ties were severed twice at Colombo's initiative.² Nevertheless, the contacts did not cease because Sri Lanka's political parties were highly pragmatic and tended to ignore ideological principles. Both the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) saw benefit in maintaining connections with Israel. However, Sri Lanka's desire to maintain cordial relations with the Arab states constituted a serious obstacle on the road to rapprochement. Moreover, Colombo's inclination to side with the countries of the Third World and its aversion to colonialism kept it distant from Israel. Yet Sri Lanka could not afford to ignore a country which made its technological and scientific know-how available in areas where they were most needed.

Israel's relations with Sri Lanka were distant from the very beginning. Sri Lankan officials did not seem willing to identify with the Zionist enterprise.³ Portraying itself as a member of the nonaligned Third World nations, Sri Lanka showed little interest in the Jewish state and its officials were more interested in developing cordial relations with the Arab world. Consequently, little effort was made to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Israeli citizens who wished to go to Sri Lanka or pass through it had to obtain an affidavit from the British Embassy.⁴ Moreover, Sri Lanka's representatives at the United Nations had normally voted with the Afro-Asian bloc against Israel. At the same time, however, the bilateral relations were by no means hostile. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials operated under the assumption that Colombo gave de facto recognition to Israel

although Sri Lankan officials never confirmed that recognition.⁵ The Sri Lankan government sought to escape criticism from Third World countries most of which were hostile to Israel, yet officials in Colombo had a great appreciation for Israel's technical know-how and sought to benefit from its expertise. Sri Lankan officials were highly impressed by the remarkable success of the Israeli technical experts in Burma and other small states in the region. Consequently, Israeli experts were invited to Sri Lanka to develop water and salt projects. Modest commercial deals were reached and Ceylon Air occasionally landed at Ben Gurion Airport. Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry adopted a pragmatic attitude. As long as the bilateral relations remained cordial and the Israeli experts were allowed to operate in Sri Lanka they felt no need to pressure Colombo into granting official recognition to Israel. Besides, they had a strong conviction that Sri Lanka was not likely to establish formal relations with Israel as long as India's relations with Israel were not clearly defined.⁶

By the mid-1950s, there were encouraging signs that Colombo was beginning to warm to Israel. Ambassador Senarat Gunawardene, who took office in the spring of 1954, expressed appreciation for the Zionist enterprise and hinted that as soon as his country became a UN member its attitude toward Israel would improve and the ties between the two countries would be formalized.⁷ However, officials in Jerusalem were far from being optimistic. They insisted on immediate recognition as a precondition for inviting Prime Minister John Kotelawala to visit Israel.⁸ When Sri Lanka followed in India's steps and supported Israel's participation in the Bandung Conference the Israelis were encouraged to continue their efforts to improve the bilateral relations.⁹

In the spring of 1955, Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry informed its Israeli counterpart that it considered the relations between the two countries normal and friendly despite the fact that they remained informal. Moreover, Sri Lankan officials stated that the decision to recognize Israel had already been made in 1950, and that their government felt no need to issue a formal declaration to that effect at that time.¹⁰ As turned out, however, raising the issue of recognition proved to be beneficial to Israel. In the summer of 1955, the Sri Lankan government extended official recognition to Israel.¹¹ The Dutch Ambassador, who arrived from Sri Lanka in December 1955, stated that Sri Lanka's Prime Minister expressed a friendly attitude toward Israel saying, 'we should make a special effort to strengthen the ties'.¹² However, it was not until the spring of 1956 that Sri Lanka agreed in principle to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.¹³

What prompted the Sri Lankan government to move toward better relations with Israel was the desire to continue benefiting from its technical assistance. Israel's involvement in other countries throughout the region kept its experts and engineers overly preoccupied and officials in Colombo feared that Israel might abandon some of the valuable projects it had started in Sri Lanka and send the experts elsewhere. Witnessing the effectiveness of Israel's technical assistance to countries such as Burma and Nepal, officials in Colombo were highly impressed. A Sri Lankan official had openly admitted that his government did not wish to lose Israel's technical aid, saying, 'There is here almost a child-like faith in the skill of the Israeli technicians.'¹⁴

Witnessing the rapprochement between the two countries, the Arab countries became concerned,¹⁵ and the Arab Boycott Office appealed to all Arab governments to convince Sri Lanka not to cooperate with Israel.¹⁶ As it turned out, this appeal had little effect on

the bilateral relations. Israel's relations with Sri Lanka remained cordial and even the anti-Israeli sentiment which prevailed in all Asian countries in the wake of the Suez Affair did not have an adverse effect on them. The Sri Lankan government found it necessary to join the chorus of all nonaligned countries, which condemned Israeli collusion with Great Britain and France,¹⁷ but this event had little consequence on the future of the bilateral relations. In fact, when the crisis was over, Shimon was appointed as Israel's Minister to Sri Lanka, and Solomon Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister and founder of the SLFP, reassured Sharet that relations between the two countries would not suffer.¹⁸ Sharet's visit to Sri Lanka in the autumn of 1956 was a remarkable success. However, fearing a terrorist attack by groups who opposed the regime, the government did not make the necessary arrangements for a public address by the Israeli guest. In a letter to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, W.G. Wickremesinghe explained that his government had no means to provide proper security arrangements for the occasion. He said, 'As you are aware, we have a number of races in our country and it is quite possible that while every precaution was taken, a small group of trouble makers might have heckled Mr. Sharet.'¹⁹

Sri Lanka's cordial relations with Israel continued; however, the fear of antagonizing the Arab states forced Colombo to keep Israel at a distance and gradually the bilateral relations began to cool off. So concerned was the Sri Lankan government about Arab reaction that after purchasing two frigates from Israel its agents were instructed to leave them in Eilat harbor.

The bilateral relations cooled even further when Solomon Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959 and his widow and successor, Sirimavo Bandaranaike came to power. The new regime identified with Soviet aims and tolerated the pro-Soviet Communist Party. Mrs Bandaranaike was a staunch believer in nonalignment. She said in one of her speeches, 'It is my firm belief that non-alignment and the future of the world are inextricably linked together.'²⁰ Mrs Bandaranaike's commitment to nonalignment was not only a matter of principle. It was a result of Sri Lanka's attempt to mend fences with India.²¹ Anxious to play a role in the nonaligned group of nations in which India was a prominent member Mrs Bandaranaike's government yielded to pressure exerted by the member countries and the dialogue with Israel came to an end. Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Israel, who had been appointed by former Prime Minister Wijeyananda Dahanayake, was recalled and during the 1960s Israeli affairs were handled by Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Rome. However, even at that point the cooperation between the two countries did not cease. The Sri Lankan government remained interested in Israeli suggestions regarding economic cooperation. In January 1962, the Permanent Secretary of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Israeli Charge d'Affaires that 'The Government of Ceylon is ready to examine my specific offers in the matter of technical and economic cooperation that Israel may wish to make provided that such offers would contribute to programmes of economic development.'²² Such statements by Sri Lankan officials left Israeli Foreign Ministry officials in the dark regarding Colombo's real intentions. The bilateral relations were unstable from July 1962, when Mrs Bandaranaike decided not to appoint a minister for Israel. Speculating on the nature of the bilateral relations in that period an Israeli delegation member in Colombo wrote:

A look back at the period since the decision not to appoint the minister was taken might give the impression that we are in a perpetual, though slow, state of progress—at least in matters affecting our contacts at governmental level. Indeed, there are some improvements—but overall, there is no consistent line. Every day might bring a sudden negative change. The positive basis of our relations with Ceylon is neither wide nor too deep.²³

Although she was reluctant to mention the impact of Arab pressure on her government's policy toward Israel, Mrs Bandaranaike hinted that her government was not free to conduct an independent foreign policy while adding that it was possible to expect a gradual improvement in the bilateral relations.²⁴ Sympathetic Sri Lankan officials advised their Israeli counterparts to take every opportunity to establish an economic and political foothold in Sri Lanka as a way to counter Arab influence.²⁵ Gunawardene had specifically told the Israelis that the Arabs used the boycott as a way to dissuade his government from upgrading its relations with Israel.²⁶ An article published in the daily *Ha'aretz*, in September 1964, stated that there were indications that the relations with Sri Lanka were improving. He called upon the Israeli government to take advantage of Sri Lanka's interest in technical know-how in order to strengthen the bilateral ties.²⁷ Further attempts were made in 1965 by the Israeli Foreign Ministry to upgrade the ties. However, officials in Colombo remained cautious, stating that while the Sri Lankan government was willing to accept a resident minister, this should be done without fanfare and publicity. When asked whether they would be willing to appoint a minister to Israel they argued that the time was not appropriate for such a move.²⁸ Nevertheless, beneath the surface Israel's military activities in Sri Lanka began in earnest. By the late spring of 1967, reports began to circulate in the press that the Sri Lankan intelligence bureau had sent secret agents for training in Israel.²⁹ Although there was criticism of Israel among the Muslims in Sri Lanka, both the press and public opinion were favorable toward Israel.³⁰

The Six Day War put the Sri Lankan government in a serious dilemma. While it was unwilling to condemn Israel for starting the war it found it extremely difficult to oppose all anti-Israeli resolutions passed by the United Nations. Sri Lanka's representative to the United Nations, Dudley Senanayake, did not subscribe to the view held by countries like India, the Soviet Union and Bulgaria that Israel was the aggressor. He issued a statement expressing deep concern about the events in the Middle East but Israel was not named as an aggressor. In fact, he argued that calling Israel an aggressor was not the solution to the crisis.

Although Sri Lanka did not vote for resolutions condemning Israel it did not always side with the United States.³¹ Senanayake argued that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories; that there should be no linkage between Israel's withdrawal and wider issues; and that Israel's withdrawal should not be contingent upon Arab recognition of the State of Israel. Moreover, he suggested that the UN Emergency Force be restored to its former place along the Israeli-Egyptian border. In a Throne Speech of 8 July 1967 he referred to the situation in the Middle East saying that his country was concerned about the events in the Middle East and 'will endeavour to act in concert with the other countries of the world to find a reasonable and durable solution to the problems besetting the region'.³² There were anti-Israeli voices in the opposition who criticized the

government's position in the conflict. Thus, for example, P.G.B.Keuneman argued on that occasion that the government should sever diplomatic relations with Israel unless it withdrew from the occupied territories. Senanayake's response was that the government was not in favor of severing relations with Israel and that not a single Asian nation had decided to react so drastically. Moreover, he went to the extent of criticizing India, saying that while condemning Israel it maintained a Consul General in that country. Opposition from the Arab states was no less critical. The Iraqis complained that although the Arabs imported large amounts of tea from Sri Lanka the government persisted in its anti-Arab stand. One of the most critical articles against Sri Lanka appeared in the *Baghdad News* on 23 June 1967. Senanayake did not yield to the Iraqi pressure. On the contrary, he demanded an apology and shortly afterwards he announced in the House of Representatives that his government had protested and received an apology from the Iraqis.³³ When the discussion on the Middle East took place on 22 August 1967, Sri Lanka's representative argued that the crisis must be resolved due to the adverse effect that it had on his country's economy, particularly the 17.5 per cent increase in freight charges.³⁴

The opposition parties took the opportunity to capitalize on the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to embarrass the government. Led by Mrs Bandaranaike the opposition pressed for a break in diplomatic ties. Shortly after the war the United Front, which consisted of the SLFP, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Land Equal Society Party, LSSP) and the Communist Party held meetings in support of the Arabs and demanded that Senanayake's government sever its relations with Israel. Nevertheless, Senanayake did not yield to these pressures until he was out of office in May 1970. His final statement about the Middle East on 28 August 1967 was favorable to the Arabs but he was clear about his government's determination not to sever diplomatic relations with Israel.³⁵

Senanayake's ability to stick to his guns stemmed partly from the inability of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka to unite and oppose the government's policy. Until 1967 the main Muslim organizations such as the All-Ceylon Muslim League, the All-Ceylon Moors Association and the All-Ceylon Malay Association cooperated smoothly with the UNP. This united front was broken with the formation of the Islamic Socialist Front (ISF) under Al-Haj Badiuddin Mahmud, the Vice President of the SLFP, who was known for his socialist views. After its establishment the ISF operated in the shadow of the SLFP and it attracted Muslims who were dissatisfied with the traditional Muslim-UNP alliance. However, Muslim leaders who had differences with Mahmud rejected the ISF. One of them, M.I.Mohamed decided to found the Anti-Marxist Muslim United Front, which did not attract many members. As the power of the ISF grew there was much tension within the ranks of the Muslim elite. The disagreement came out in the open in August 1969, after the burning of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Mohamed and Mahmud participated in a mass rally at the Maradana mosque. President of the All-Ceylon Muslim League, M.C.M.Kateel exploited the opportunity to lash out at Mahmud, accusing him of causing controversy, and the crowd of 5,000 men dispersed with bitterness. Although the leaders spoke about the need to unite in order to save Islam from danger and to forget their differences, the rivalry proved too strong. This was the first time that the Muslim political elite was actually challenged and Middle Eastern politics began to loom large in the attitude of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, which hitherto had been noted for its

conservatism.³⁶

Israel's relations with Sri Lanka were severed on 29 July 1970 as soon as the United Front came to power. As it turned out, the secession of diplomatic relations with Israel did not earn Sri Lanka handsome dividends in the Arab world. The Arab states were not in a position to provide technical assistance to Sri Lanka. Mrs Bandaranaike admitted herself that the act had an adverse effect on Sri Lanka's economy because certain firms in Britain which had connections with Israel refused to trade with Sri Lanka.³⁷ Commenting on the step taken by the Sri Lankan government analysts argued that it was a major disappointment for the pro-Arab elements, which supported the move. Vijaya Samaraweera writes:

Thus the present government has acknowledged that the breaking off of relations with Israel has had repercussions on Sri Lanka's foreign trade. Conversely, though the government expected that due recognition for this gesture would be given by the Arab states, it found to its great disappointment, and despite many urgings, that it received no special treatment from them during the oil crisis. On the other hand, governments have also realized that economic considerations would always impose limits on the militancy Sri Lanka could assume in international politics.³⁸

Appreciating Israel's expertise in many fields, the Sri Lankan government still wished to maintain the cooperation. The Sri Lanka-Israel Friendship Association, which had 158 members, began lobbying for stronger ties and pressured the government to resume diplomatic relations with Israel following the increase of oil prices by OPEC in October 1973.

Although Sri Lankans were not particularly familiar with Jewish history, and tended to accept the allegation made by many Third World countries that Zionism was a tool of imperialism, many Sri Lankans believed that the Arab states' desire to liquidate the State of Israel was unrealistic.³⁹ Sri Lankan officials continued to visit Israel and in September 1976 Herzog gave a dinner in honor of Sri Lanka's President of the UN General Assembly, Shirley Amarasingh.⁴⁰ While both governments were taking steps to enhance the bilateral relations the Sri Lankan opposition persisted in its anti-Israel rhetoric. In a Third World conference which took place in Colombo from 16–19 August 1976, former Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike told the delegates that Israel and the United States were the main obstacles to world peace.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the political changes which took place in Sri Lanka proved to have a salutary effect on the bilateral relations. Several SLFP members and over 21 MPs were in favor of renewing the ties with Israel at that time. Reports circulated in the Sri Lankan press that UNP leader, Junius Jayewardene was planning to take several radical steps: to break away from the nonaligned bloc; to improve his country's relations with the United States and to restore relations with Israel. According to these reports, Washington was interested in helping Israel gain recognition in Asia and therefore pressured Colombo to renew ties with Israel. There was also speculation that in his eagerness to obtain US financial support Jayewardene decided to resume the dialogue with Israel. The same sources argued that contacts between the two countries took place in various locations in the Third World. Israel's former Chargé

d'Affaires to Sri Lanka, Yitzhak Navon who managed to establish contacts with the leaders of the opposition which later came to power, was told that Sri Lanka would renew its ties with Israel within two or three years and both sides agreed to continue the contacts.⁴²

The Sri Lankan government found it easier to deal with Israel on an unofficial basis and refrained from inviting Israeli officials or teams in an official capacity. In the spring of 1979, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry deemed it necessary not to allow its cricket team to play against the Israeli team in the second Prudential World Cricket Cup game that was scheduled to take place in England on 4 June 1979.⁴³ However, when it came to more practical and less showy matters the Sri Lankans were less discriminating. They allowed Israeli experts on agriculture to visit the country. The Israelis began working on the Mahaveli River Project and on the construction of four big dams, which created lakes of 15 to 20 square kilometers. The surplus of water created thereby had greatly increased the rice production. In addition, the Histadrut organized seminars and workshops in Sri Lanka, and in 1981 Histadrut Secretary Yeroham Meshel was invited to visit Colombo. However, fearing criticism that his visit to a country which did not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel was inappropriate, he declined.⁴⁴

Jayewardene's regime wished to renew the contact with Israel but Arab pressure once again stood in the way. However, Jayewardene decided to follow a practical course of action by contacting the Israelis, whose expertise in guerrilla warfare he greatly admired. Jayewardene may have also been angered by reports about mistreatment of Sri Lankan citizens in Arab countries. The most obvious case, which caused considerable anger in Sri Lanka, was the harsh punishment inflicted by the UAE government on a Sinhalese Buddhist woman for committing adultery with an Indian immigrant. Initially condemned to be stoned, her sentence was commuted and she remained in prison where she was forced to wear sackcloth until her child was born. Also, widespread rumors that the PLO had been involved in training Tamil guerrillas had probably angered Jayewardene. However, according to sources in the United States, the overriding factor in his decision to approach the Israelis was his desire to convince Washington to pressure India not to intervene in the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict.⁴⁵ Wishing to broaden their country's contacts with Asia, Israeli diplomats were glad to seize the opportunity. However, some thought that involvement in the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, which such a connection entailed, could be detrimental to Israel's cause. Thus, for example, Netanel Lorch who founded Israel's Legation in Colombo wrote:

Relations with Sri Lanka are definitely in Israel's interest... If Israel has to pay a price for such restoration, so be it. But not at any price. Agricultural cooperation as stated in the laconic announcement made by the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, seems proper and adequate. But if active help in combating Tamil Guerrillas in the north is part of the deal—and one must still hope that it is not—it must be clearly stated that the price is exorbitant, the return not commensurate, and that Israel's government would be well advised to reconsider its decision.⁴⁶

Normalizing relations with Israel proved to be more complicated than officials in

Colombo realized. Any contact with Israel had to be preceded by a formal diplomatic move. Overt diplomatic relations with Israel were too flashy and too risky because they were likely to alienate both the Arab states and the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Colombo decided to allow Israel to open an interest section within the US Embassy. Press reports in Colombo announced that although diplomatic relations between the two countries would not be established, the opening of an interest section at the US Embassy was an important step forward. According to these reports, the need for agricultural and technical aid prompted Colombo to contact Israel.⁴⁷ When confronted by his critics, Jayewardene explained that both the United States and Great Britain failed to respond to Sri Lanka's needs and therefore normalizing relations with Israel was a necessity.⁴⁸

The fact that Israel had the wherewithal to provide superb military training to the Sri Lankan armed forces was a factor that Colombo had to reckon with. In an answer to critics who castigated his government for relying on Israeli help, Minister of National Security Lalith Athulathmudali asked, 'Why can't Sri Lanka get the best consultants to help eliminate terrorism in this country?'⁴⁹ He told PLO Ambassador Khairuddin Abdul Rahman, 'Our people say that they have never had such good training... Everyone is entitled to the best they can get.'⁵⁰ And when opposition members asked him why Sri Lanka did not ask for help from the British SAS or the US Green Berets, he said, 'What we have chosen is the best in the world.'⁵¹ Foreign Minister S.Hameed, who was confronted on the same issue said, 'We looked into the terrorist problem...and set out to find the best foreign service available to us. Finally, we decided on the Israelis and asked the Americans to help us arrange it.'⁵² When pressured by foreign journalists to reveal the nature of their contacts with Israel, officials in Colombo tended to downplay the issue saying that the Israelis organized courses but did not act as military advisers.⁵³

Jayewardene's decision to contact Israel was in part determined by his aversion to communism. Despite opposition from Muslim leaders he declared his intention not to sever the contacts with Israel. He told A.Jeyaratnam Wilson that he was going to ignore the protests of all Muslim leaders.⁵⁴ At the meeting of the Working Committee of his party, Jayewardene reiterated that he 'did not care' about the views of the Muslims regarding the presence of the Israelis in Sri Lanka.⁵⁵ His pragmatic approach led him to ignore the mounting criticism of the opposition whose power increased considerably as a result of his refusal to terminate the contacts with Israel. In a news conference he said that in order to combat those rebels who wished to create a Marxist state he would be ready to become friendly with the Devil and that despite mounting protests he would not withdraw his request for Israel's help.⁵⁶ Clearly, Jayewardene had taken a calculated risk despite the danger of alienating the Muslims who generally voted for the UNP and the strong Muslim representation in the Cabinet. Particularly upset at Jayewardene's initiative were young Muslims who voiced their opposition to him and his party in the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress.⁵⁷

What made Jayewardene determined to stick to his connections with Israel was the fact that five Tamil groups were being trained in Palestinian camps.⁵⁸ Yet despite his firm stand on this issue he was compelled to silence the Muslim opposition whose spokesmen argued that they were concerned that the Israeli-trained commandos would adopt the 'Mossad principle' and assassinate exiled Tamil insurgent leaders in Madras and thereby

provoke an Indian retaliation. Moreover, Jayewardene found it prudent to reaffirm his support for the Palestinians. Athulathmudali insisted that Sri Lanka's foreign policy had not changed and that the government's support for the Palestinians would remain firm.⁵⁹

It was inevitable that Palestinian involvement in training the Tamils would encourage the Israelis to intensify their activities on behalf of Sri Lanka's government. Sri Lanka employed Israeli agents in order to help it fight Tamil insurgents and in doing so alienated not only the local Muslims but also the Arab countries. Numerous demonstrations in Colombo and other cities were held and those who knew about the government's connection with Israel were hardly surprised to learn that Jayewardene imposed censorship on all matters relating to that connection. Tamil sources blamed the government for abandoning nonalignment and siding with US imperialism and the Tamil Muslim United Front organized a major campaign to force Jayewardene to sever his contacts with Israel.⁶⁰ In addition, Muslims, left-wing groups and communists lashed out at the government's decision. Prominent Muslims like Razeek Fareed, President of the All-Ceylon Muslim League, and several other ministers threatened that they would resign if Colombo upgraded its relations with Israel.⁶¹ A bomb apparently intended for David Matnai, an Israeli agent who reportedly was sent to Colombo by the Mossad, exploded in Lanka Oberoi Hotel. In an effort to silence the opposition, Sri Lanka's Foreign Affairs Minister Shahul Hamad stated that he had consulted the Arab governments and obtained their approval for the decision to invite Israeli consultants.⁶² Nevertheless, the Arabs responded with great indignation, saying that the Israelis were providing assistance to Sri Lanka as proxies of the United States.⁶³ Iraq, which was one of the most important purchasers of Sri Lankan tea, decided to downgrade its embassy in Colombo. A similar reaction came from Saudi Arabia, which refused to accept a new Sri Lankan Ambassador and stated that it would no longer invest in Sri Lankan economic projects such as the Maduru Oyu as long as Mossad agents remained in the country.⁶⁴ Other Arab countries joined the fray, saying that they would no longer recruit Sri Lankan workers.⁶⁵ Jordan asked the Sri Lankan government to reconsider its connection with Israel.⁶⁶ Iran and Libya voiced their criticism of the Sri Lankan government for its decision to collaborate with the Zionist regime. Muslims and pro-Muslims throughout the world wrote critical comments in the press.⁶⁷ Comments made by PLO officials were even more critical. In June 1984, the *Palestine Post* published a critical article entitled 'Zionists Join Attack on Tamils'. That the Gulf countries did not react more vigorously to Colombo's resumption of relations with Israel was largely due to the high-grade tea which they imported from Sri Lanka.⁶⁸ Jayewardene tried to reduce the harm done by reaffirming his support for the Palestinians and involving Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq in mediating between Sri Lanka and the Arabs, but he had no intention of terminating his connections with Israel.

Sri Lankan sources sought to silence their critics by denying that Israelis were involved in combat operations and that Mossad agents were active in the country.⁶⁹ Sri Lanka's Minister of National Security said in one of his interviews that it was not the Mossad but the Shin Bet (Israel's General Security Services) that was involved in the affair.⁷⁰ However, there were reports that both Israeli intelligence agencies were involved.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Arab criticism remained unrelenting. Especially disquieting for the Arabs was a statement made by Sri Lanka's State Ministry Secretary Douglas Liyanage to the *Jerusalem Post* that in light of the Camp David accords he saw no reason why Sri Lanka,

which had already recognized the PLO and had representatives in all Arab states, should not have one in Israel.⁷² Liyanage had also confirmed a statement made by Israeli sources that only five non-military government officials were operating in Sri Lanka.⁷³ Opposition leader Anura Bandaranaike criticized Liyanage's visit to Israel and asked that the government retract his statement. Otherwise, she said, 'It will be sufficient proof that he acted with the full knowledge of the government.' Consequently, Liyanage tendered his resignation. Officials in Jerusalem argued that Liyanage was a victim of his political rivals in Sri Lanka. It seems that there was some truth in their argument since Liyanage had already been accused once of an attempt to overthrow Bandaranaike's regime.⁷⁴ Yet the campaign against the government's association with Israel did not cease. Newspaper editorials called Sri Lanka's association with Israel 'an act of desperation' and expressed disappointment over Colombo's disregard for Arab concerns and the adverse effect which Muslim anger could have on Sri Lanka's economy.⁷⁵

Arab critics of Sri Lanka's pro-Israel stand were no less vociferous. Some argued that Israel's collaboration with Sri Lanka could result in besieging the Arab world from the Far East. Others were concerned that Israel would use Sri Lankan workers as spies.⁷⁶ In addition, Israel was denounced for being a US surrogate in Colombo.⁷⁷ However, the argument that the United States was using Israel to further its aims could hardly be substantiated. The initiative to invite the Israelis was clearly Colombo's choice. It was only after both Israel and Sri Lanka expressed an interest in improving their relations that the United States entered the picture.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, criticism of both governments continued throughout Asia. There were even those who argued that Israel was interested in creating greater tension in the region in order to increase the demand for its experts and its domestically manufactured arms.⁷⁹ An editorial in the *Jerusalem Post* contained the following: 'The Tamils have no quarrel with the State of Israel...get out of Sri Lanka and halt the training of Sri Lankan Government forces against the Tamils. I beg, plead and demand that they do so before we reach a point of no return.'⁸⁰

The Israeli government, however, did not seem willing to listen to such pleas. Reports about Israel's involvement in the country continued to circulate in the foreign press. PLO Ambassador to India Khairuddin Abdul Rahman charged that about 60 Mossad commanders were sent to Sri Lanka in order to fight Tamil rebels and that they were attached to the Israeli interest office in Colombo. Criticism of the Sri Lankan government did not cease despite its intense propaganda campaign which portrayed the Tamil liberation movement as a surrogate of the Soviet Union and the instrument of communism. Critics argued that the Israelis were called upon not only to provide expert advice on guerrilla war but also to teach the Sri Lankan government how to deprive the Tamils of their homeland.⁸¹ There was even speculation that the Israelis taught the government forces nefarious combat strategies which included practices such as house-burning in order to force the Tamils to abandon their land.⁸²

To ward off criticism of its connection with Israel, the Sri Lankan government responded by saying that it had no intention of resuming diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. Sri Lankan officials explained that Israel was given permission to open an interest section at the US Embassy because other friendly countries refused to help Sri Lanka in its struggle against the Tamil separatists. The Israelis remained unimpressed by this concession. However, given the fact that diplomatic relations were severed in 1970,

and that Sri Lanka was in the forefront of the Nonaligned Movement, this was no mean achievement.⁸³ When confronted by their critics on this issue, officials in Colombo admitted that a few Israeli experts were involved in training Sri Lankan personnel in information-gathering activities and said that 'there were no more Zionists in the country'.⁸⁴ Israel became a target of foreign criticism as well. Both opponents and friends voiced their disapproval of its involvement in Sri Lanka. Officials in Washington argued that Israel was not supposed to help other governments unless its security was at stake.⁸⁵ Israel's relations with India were adversely affected as well. Indira Gandhi was reported to have complained about the presence of Israeli agents in Sri Lanka.⁸⁶ Israeli officials responded by saying that their military aid to Sri Lanka had come to an end and that only a few farming experts remained.⁸⁷

The collaboration between the two countries did not cease despite the pressure exerted on both governments. In January 1985, Jayawardene told the National Assembly about his plan to resettle 200,000 Sinhalese in sensitive areas, meaning land claimed by the Tamils, where they would be expected to work while defending these regions, and to provide them with agricultural and military training on the Israeli kibbutz pattern.⁸⁸ Sri Lanka's Minister of Rural Industries S.Thondaman visited Israel in May 1985, and Foreign Minister Hamad met his Israeli counterpart, Shamir. Moreover, Sri Lanka made no attempt to conceal the fact that it was buying Deborah guard boats from Israel.⁸⁹ Fearing accusations that its military aid was intended to help the Sri Lankan government suppress the Tamils and the possible damage that this could inflict on its relations with India, Israel denied the sale.⁹⁰ According to Tamil spokesmen, British, Pakistani and Israeli pilots were flying Sri Lankan aircraft. There were also reports that Israeli 'mercenaries' were fighting with the Sri Lankan armed forces against the Tamils.⁹¹ However, there was no evidence to support these claims. Israel's cooperation with Sri Lanka continued not only in the military field—it had experts that helped in agriculture and water projects, some of whom were involved in the multi-billion-dollar international project on the Mahalewi River.⁹²

That the cooperation with Sri Lanka became a source of concern to the Israelis was largely due to India's disapproval.⁹³ Herzog's visit to Sri Lanka in November 1986 triggered a negative response from India but did not lead to a severe crisis.⁹⁴ Yet officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry had reason to be concerned. No less devastating was the impact of the Israeli connection on the Sri Lankan government. A booklet entitled *The Mossad Connection and State Terrorism in Sri Lanka* published by the Tamil Information Center in London that year was brought to the attention of the world. It embarrassed the government and caused it to review its relations with Israel. The bilateral relations were viewed not only as damaging the government's image in the world community but also as detrimental to Sri Lanka's relations with its immediate neighbors. Seeking to reach an agreement that would end Indian involvement in Sri Lankan affairs, Jayewardene was willing to make concessions, one of which probably entailed ending the Israeli presence in Sri Lanka.⁹⁵ After signing the peace pact with India in July 1978, Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi spoke of an understanding 'about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that their presence would not prejudice Indo-Sri Lankan relations'.⁹⁶ Indian officials had consistently expressed their disapproval of Israel's presence in Sri Lanka. However,

although Israeli intervention in Sri Lanka was not regarded with favor in New Delhi it is doubtful that this was the reason for India's intervention in Sri Lankan affairs. In fact, this issue provided a convenient excuse for New Delhi to intervene. Commenting on this factor and its impact on India's policy toward Sri Lanka, Sumantra Bose writes:

However disturbing or unwelcome the presence in Sri Lanka of small numbers of British mercenaries, Israeli intelligence operatives, or Pakistani military instructors, as well as of limited American broadcasting facilities (for the VOA), might have been to Indian foreign policy officials, that by itself can hardly be regarded as constituting a sufficient reason for the commitment of thousands of troops in an area torn apart by civil war in a neighboring country.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, what mattered was the fact that Rajiv Gandhi made the elimination of foreign troops, Israelis or others, in Sri Lanka a sine qua non for an agreement. This did not leave Jayewardene much choice but to consider bringing his military contacts with Israel to an end. There were domestic constraints as well. Given the fact both the UNP and the SLFP had to compete for the Muslim vote the pressure to cut off all contacts with Israel was considerable. Therefore, on 20 March 1990 Sri Lanka's President Ransinghe Premadasa decided to sever his country's relations with Israel by closing its interest section at the US Embassy. The Sri Lankan government announced that the ties would be restored only after Israel recognized the PLO, withdrew from all occupied territories and agreed to participate in an international conference to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. This act brought the bilateral relations that had been renewed in 1984 to an end. Israel, it seems, had lost its usefulness. After the conclusion of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of July 1987, whose aim was to end the war between the Sri Lankan forces and the Tamils, the presence of Israeli personnel in Sri Lanka seemed not only superfluous but also embarrassing. Although the Muslims constituted no more than 8 per cent of the total population, their criticism against the government was quite vocal. The leftist SLFP opposition made political profit by attacking the government's association with Israel. In the election campaign of 1988, the ruling party agreed to close the Israeli interest section. Officials in Jerusalem did not comment on this move except to say that it came as a result of 'a change in Sri Lankan priorities'.⁹⁸

Israel's involvement in Sri Lanka came to the world's attention once again when the book *By Way of Deception: The Making and Unmaking of a Mossad Officer* by Victor Ostrovsky and Claire Hoy appeared in 1990. The book, publication of which the Israeli government attempted to prevent by telling St Martin's Press that it was liable to have an adverse effect on Israel's security, revealed the extent of its involvement in Sri Lanka. The authors claimed that the Mossad was training Tamil fighters in Israel.⁹⁹ Although the book stirred up controversy, most sources confirmed that such training did take place.¹⁰⁰ The news was a source of embarrassment for both Israel and the Sri Lankan government, which stated that it agreed to conduct an official investigation into this matter.¹⁰¹ Premadasa faced enormous difficulties in the autumn of 1991. When dissidents and opposition groups decided to exploit his connection with Israel in order to oust him from office he was quick to point to the Mossad as the source of his troubles. He told his party members: The Mossad espionage service is now very angry with me. I know that this

campaign now going on is receiving enormous funds.¹⁰² Seeking to ward off criticism from his political enemies, Premadasa decided to order the Israelis to leave the country. This decision was harshly criticized by Jayewardene, who considered the act rude and inconsiderate. When the Israeli mission was asked to leave the interest section at the US Embassy a farewell party was given to the Israeli personnel. Not a single cabinet minister was present. The only Sri Lankan MP who attended the event was Deputy Speaker Gamini Fonseka. Only Jayewardene spoke on behalf of the bilateral relations and took the opportunity to thank the Israelis for their assistance.¹⁰³

Following Premadasa's assassination, Dingiri Banda Wigtana decided to establish friendly relations with all nations. However, Israel's increasing interest in upgrading its relations with India proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. A Sri Lankan government official stated that his country was compelled to reassess his country's relations with Israel in light of Peres's visit to neighboring India in the early summer of 1993.¹⁰⁴ According to Ari Ben Menashe, who represented himself as a Mossad agent, Israel planned to use Sri Lanka's collaboration as a middleman in order to transfer military aircraft to Iran. The Israelis hoped that this sale would lead to the release of three Israelis captured by Shiites in Lebanon. According to his book, *Profits of War*, Sri Lanka was to be compensated by Israeli military assistance. Excerpts from the book were published in Sri Lanka and according to them Israel had transferred money to Tamil rebels in order that they buy military equipment from the PLO.¹⁰⁵ Ben Menashe argued that he worked under former Prime Minister Shamir. According to Sri Lankan sources, Ben Menashe arrived in Colombo in July 1989 and met Premadasa and other high-ranking officers. He also met Tamil rebels in the northern region which they occupied. The deal was canceled when the press revealed that Shamir used the PLO in order to supply weapons to the Tamils. Two years earlier, a former Israeli agent said that the Israeli secret services trained Sri Lankan army and the Tamil guerrillas simultaneously. According to the same source, Israel sold military equipment to Sri Lanka; however, a spokesman for the Sri Lankan government stated that these claims could not be substantiated.¹⁰⁶

In the spring of 1995, Sri Lanka turned to Israel asking to renew the ties, but officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were not anxious to respond. Their response was that 'Our current international standing is different from what it used to be in the past.'¹⁰⁷ In the autumn of 1995, Israel obtained US permission to sell Kfir aircraft to Sri Lanka. Colombo renewed its request for Israeli arms. However, it stated explicitly that it was in no position to establish overt diplomatic relations with Israel due to the opposition of the Islamic Party whose leader announced that he would leave the ruling coalition government if it decided to renew diplomatic relations with Israel.¹⁰⁸ Some Israeli Foreign Ministry officials expressed doubts regarding the need to sell arms to Sri Lanka. They argued that in the past Israel had sought good relations with Sri Lanka as a way to reach India but since Israeli-Indian relations had improved there was no longer a need for mediators. They added that selling arms to the Sri Lankan regime could lead the Tamil minority not only to identify with the Palestinians but also to engage in acts of terrorism against Israel.¹⁰⁹ Disappointed by Sri Lanka's behavior in the past and the fact that it severed its diplomatic relations with Israel in 1970, and again in 1990, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials have adopted a nonchalant attitude toward Colombo.¹¹⁰ One of them told the author:

Recent developments in our diplomatic relations do not warrant efforts to renew the diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka. Much has been invested in Sri Lanka. We have supplied the Sri Lankans with technical aid. Israel's image has been severely tarnished as a result of our involvement in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government severed its relations with Israel twice. Now there is much less interest in diplomatic relations with that country since the Indo-Israeli rapprochement has considerably reduced the value of such relations.¹¹¹

By the mid-1990s, there were clear signs that the Sri Lankan government was seeking to normalize its relations with Israel. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga expressed deep shock over Rabin's assassination at what he described as a 'critical juncture in the Middle East peace process' and sent his condolences to President Ezer Weizman. A similar message was sent by Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar to Peres.¹¹² The two countries have been maintaining economic and security ties even after Colombo's decision to sever its diplomatic relations with Israel. Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry acknowledged that the contacts between the two countries did not cease. When asked by the author whether or not diplomatic ties with Colombo are a possibility a senior Foreign Ministry official answered in the affirmative.¹¹³ However, the difficulties were compounded by the late 1990s, when the peace process seemed to be coming to a screeching halt and thus made it far more difficult for Colombo to normalize relations with Israel without antagonizing its Muslim population. Despite the outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa and the failure of the peace process, cooperation with Israel was still valued in Colombo. Moreover, the Indo-Israeli rapprochement increased Israel's value in the eyes of the Sri Lankan government, whose officials were highly impressed by Israel's technical know-how and wished to benefit from its contact with Washington. However, a major stumbling block remains. Israel is already associated with assisting the Sri Lankan government against the Tamils and as long as the Sri Lankan conflict persists Colombo would find it difficult to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. Although Arab pressure on Colombo has lessened considerably, the Tamils would always point at Israel supporting their oppressive government. Furthermore, after severing relations with Israel on two occasions there are reasons to assume that the Sri Lankan government would maintain a low profile in its relations with Israel.

This chapter has demonstrated that Israel's relations with Sri Lanka were marred by several factors. First and foremost was Sri Lanka's inclination to remain a part of the Afro-Asian group of nations whose foreign policy tended to be nonaligned. Second, Colombo's fear of criticism from Muslims both inside and outside the country dissuaded it from maintaining overt relations with Israel. From Israel's point of view there were risks as well. The fact that India did not view Israel's military assistance to the Tamils favorably forced the Israeli Foreign Ministry to downplay the nature of the bilateral relations. Nevertheless, there were compelling reasons for both sides to maintain contact. Considerations of national security and economic progress forced upon Colombo the need to rely on Israeli assistance and cooperation. Successive Sri Lankan governments maintained contacts with Israel with almost complete disregard to their political orientation. Even Mrs Bandaranaike, whose official policy was pro-Soviet, maintained covert ties with Israel. After breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel for the second

time the current regime in Colombo sees little risk in rapprochement with Israel. However, the Israelis, who felt betrayed by the Sri Lankans, seem in no rush to upgrade the bilateral relations.

NOTES

1. The modern name 'Sri Lanka' is used throughout the chapter.
2. Author's interview with Nahum Eshkol.
3. It is ironic that the Tamil insurgents who fought in order to form a separate state were influenced by the drama of the Jewish immigration to Palestine. Their leaders were moved by Leon Uris's book *Exodus* and they named their group *Pulip Padai* (Army of Tigers). M.R.Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrilla* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1995), p. 24.
4. Shimoni to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/10, 21 May 1950.
5. Shimoni to Pollack, ISA FO/2555/8, 6 November 1950.
6. Eshed to Israel's Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 2560/10, 24 January 1954.
7. Elihav to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/10, 7 April 1954.
8. Lewin to Gourgey, ISA 2560/10, 6 January 1955.
9. Horam to Economic Councilor in the Israeli Embassy in London, ISA 2560/10, 27 February 1955.
10. Jansz to Lewin, ISA 2510/10, 5 March 1955.
11. Horam to Israel's Consul in Bombay, ISA 2560/10, 8 July 1955.
12. Robeck to Foreign Office, ISA 2561/3, 12 December 1955.
13. De Soya to Eytan, ISA 2560/10, 30 May 1956.
14. Peiris to Grab, ISA, 2560/10, 25 May 1956.
15. Sources in the Iraqi government stated that Israeli activities in Asian countries such as Burma and Thailand were detrimental to the Arab cause and instructed its representatives in the Political Committee of the Arab League to pay special attention to Israeli activities there. *Al-Yaum*, 7 April 1953.
16. *Difa*, 19 June 1956.
17. Vijaya Samaraweera, 'Foreign Policy', in K.M.De Silva (ed.), *Sri Lanka: A Survey* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977), p. 343.
18. Lourie to de Soya, ISA 2560/10, 29 October 1956; Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/10, 16 November 1956.
19. Wickremesingh to Lewin, ISA FO/2561/5, 23 November 1956.
20. Cited in Maureen Seneviratne, *Sirimavo Bandaranaike: The World's First Woman Prime Minister: A Biography* (Sri Lanka: Hansa Publishers, 1975), p. 186.
21. For details regarding the negotiations between Sri Lanka and India at that time see Alain Lamballe, *Le Problème Tamoul a Sri Lanka* (Paris: Université Aix-Marseille, 1985), pp. 229–52.
22. Dias to Barnea, ISA 3436/39, 10 January 1962.
23. Barnea to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3436/39, 9 February 1962.
24. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3436/39, 10 June 1963.
25. Gordon to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3405/28, 26 June 1963.

26. Avner to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3587/17, 30 January 1964.
27. *Ha'aretz*, 19 September 1964.
28. Ramati to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3587/17, 8 June 1965.
29. *The Observer*, 7 May 1967.
30. *Daily News*, 15 May 1967.
31. Eight resolutions were put to the vote between 17 June and 21 July 1967 in the General Assembly. On five resolutions Sri Lanka did not vote with the United States. It opposed it on four resolutions and abstained once.
32. Cited in H.S.S.Nissanka, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: A Study in Non-Alignment* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1984), p. 164.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
34. *Ibid.*
35. The statement included the following points: (a) The Sri Lankan government agrees that Egypt has the right to control navigation through the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba; (b) Israel must withdraw from all occupied territories; (c) Egypt has control over the Suez Canal; (d) The Arabs should not be forced to acquiesce to Israel's demand for face-to-face negotiations; (e) A UN peacekeeping force should be stationed on Egypt's border with Israel; (f) Sri Lanka continues to recognize Israel and will not sever its diplomatic relations with it. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
36. James Jupp, *Sri Lanka—Third World Democracy* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), pp. 155–7.
37. Communiqué from the Ministry of Defense and External Affairs. Cited in A.Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka 1947–1979* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 304.
38. De Silva, *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, p. 336.
39. S.Serendib, 'Ceylon and the Middle East', *International Problems*, Vol. 7, Nos 1–2 (May 1969), p. 61.
40. *Jerusalem Post*, 8 September 1976.
41. 'Proceedings of the Fifth Nonaligned Summit Conference' (Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka, September 1976), pp. 1–2.
42. 'Blitz-On Sri Lanka & Israel', *Tribune*, Vol. 22, No. 38, 11 March 1978.
43. *Jerusalem Post*, 13 April 1979.
44. *Ibid.*, 2 October 1981.
45. *Washington Times*, 20 June 1984.
46. *Jerusalem Post*, 28 June 1984.
47. *The Sun*, 22 May 1984.
48. *Jerusalem Post*, 3 July 1984; *Daily Telegraph*, 6 July 1984; *New Statesman*, 10 August 1984.
49. Aaron Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach: Arms Sales as Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985), p. 33.
50. *Saudi Gazette*, 23 August 1984.
51. *Jerusalem Post*, 1 June 1984.
52. Alan J.Bullion, *India, Sri Lanka and the Tamil Crisis: An International Perspective* (London: Pinter, 1995), pp. 80–1.
53. *New York Times*, 27 August 1984.

54. A.Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict* (London: C.Hurst & Company, 1988), p. 179.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
56. *Jerusalem Post*, 16 June 1984; 10 July 1984; *Sri Lanka News*, 7 June 1984; *Emirates Times*, 23 August 1984.
57. K.M.De Silva and Howard Wriggins, *J.R.Jayewardene of Sri Lanka—A Political Biography, Volume II: From 1956 to His Retirement (1989)* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), pp. 589, 690.
58. Documents captured in 1982 indicated that 300 Tamils had been trained in the terrorist camps. Edgare O'Balance, *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka 1973–88* (London: Brassey's, 1989), p. 15.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
60. *Tamil Times*, June 1984, p. 10.
61. G.P.V.Somararatne, 'Renewal of Ties Between Sri Lanka and Israel', *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (March 1989), p. 81.
62. *Jerusalem Post*, 27 May 1984.
63. William McGowan, *Only Man is Vile: The Tragedy of Sri Lanka* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), p. 192.
64. *The Observer*, 19 August 1984.
65. According to official statistics there were over 300,000 Sri Lankan expatriates in eight Middle Eastern countries in 1984. Their remittances totaled 6,000 million rupees, the largest earning after tea, which totaled 8,200 million rupees. *Emirates News*, 22 October 1994.
66. *Tamil Times*, November 1984, p. 11.
67. *Saturday Review*, 18 August 1984.
68. *The Guardian*, 24 January 1985.
69. *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 August 1984.
70. *Washington Post*, 11 August 1984.
71. Mohan Ram, *Sri Lanka: The Fractured Land* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989), p. 89.
72. *Saudi Gazette*, 8 September 1984; *Arab Times*, 21 August 1984.
73. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 August 1984.
74. *Ibid.*, 24 August 1984; 5 September 1984.
75. *Emirates News*, 26 September 1984; *Arab News*, 2 October 1984.
76. *Emirates News*, 28 August 1984.
77. *Deccan Herald*, 5 September 1984.
78. P.Venkateshwar Rao, 'Foreign Involvement in Sri Lanka', *The Round Table*, No. 309 (January 1989), pp. 97–8.
79. *Saudi Gazette*, 24 August 1984.
80. *Jerusalem Post*, 4 September 1984.
81. *Saturday Review*, 8 September 1984.
82. *Far East Economic Review*, 6 September 1984.
83. Rajiva Wijesinha, *Current Crisis in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1986), p. 101.
84. *Emirates News*, 13 October 1984; *Arab Times*, 5 September 1984.
85. *The Economist*, 15 September 1984.
86. *Arab News*, 26 August 1984.

87. *Jerusalem Post*, 21 August 1984; *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 August 1984.
88. O'Balance, *The Cyanide War*, p. 48.
89. The Sri Lankan government decided to buy such weapons from Israel after being turned down by the United States and Great Britain. Stewart Reiser, *The Israeli Arms Industry: Foreign Policy, Arms Transfer, and Military Doctrine of a Small State* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989), p. 218.
90. Speech by Matityahu Peled of the Progressive List for Peace, *Knesset Proceedings*, 2 December 1986.
91. O'Balance, *The Cyanide War*, pp. 55, 85.
92. *Emirates News*, 21 August 1984.
93. O'Balance, *The Cyanide War*, p. 88.
94. *Jerusalem Post*, 24 November 1986.
95. Deepak Tripathi, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy Dilemmas*, Discussion Papers 16 (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1989), p. 11.
96. Cited *ibid.*
97. Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 145.
98. *Jerusalem Post*, 23 March 1990.
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Nepal—Between the Giants of Asia

Israeli-Nepalese relations were largely determined by Nepal's sensitivity to India's reaction. Though friendly for the most part, Nepal's ties with Israel could not become overt as long as India maintained a distance from Israel. Nepalese leaders had constantly sought to maintain normal relations with India and publicly identified with its foreign policy objectives. It was largely due to its position as a Third World country bordering on India that Nepal was compelled to show solidarity with its neighbor's policy of nonalignment.¹ Neither was Nepal willing to antagonize China, with which it shares a common border. Moreover, the fear of antagonizing the Muslim world and the desire to maintain friendly relations with the Arab states dissuaded Kathmandu from upgrading its relations with Israel. Yet at the same time Nepal's leaders remained pragmatic and therefore sought to benefit from technical aid that Israel could provide. Nepal's small size had substantially magnified the value of Israel's technical assistance. From Israel's viewpoint, providing technical aid to Nepal made more sense than assisting other countries with bigger populations in that region. The progressive orientation of Nepal's Congress Party and the fact that it was sympathetic to the State of Israel in the early days tied the two countries together. From Jerusalem's point of view, there was much value in cordial relations with a country bordering the world's most populated countries like China and India, which remained reluctant to upgrade their diplomatic relations with Israel.

This chapter argues that despite domestic and external pressures successive Nepalese governments managed to maintain cordial relations with Israel without fanfare and with minimum friction with their giant neighbors. However, it not until after both powers decided to normalize their relations with Israel that Nepal could afford to follow suit. Nepal's location in the Himalayas, its small size (147, 181 square kilometers) and its proximity to China and India provided its government with a considerable degree of maneuverability, particularly since there was a conflict between these two great powers. Until the mid-1950s Nepal followed a foreign policy which clearly conformed to India's objectives. While providing Nepal with a sense of security, India's commitment to nonalignment curbed Nepal's independence. Seeking to prevent a state of subservience to either power, Nepal sought to fashion an independent foreign policy. Accordingly, by 1956 Kathmandu gave a new interpretation to nonalignment. The Indian interpretation of nonalignment in the global Cold War diplomacy was dropped in favor of *nonalignment between India and China*. The new definition actually meant, 'equal friendship with India and China'. Its implicit intention was to reduce Nepal's role in the Indian security system. This was a calculated move by King Mahendra Bir Birkam Shah Dev to neutralize Nepal.² Mahendra sought to exploit his country's strategic position by seeking economic aid from all quarters. In 1961, he concluded a border agreement with China that gave

Nepal control over the entire Mount Everest. He also agreed to China's plan to construct a road from Lhasa to Kathmandu. This was done deliberately in order to remove China's objection to any foreign policy move which the Nepalese government might choose to pursue. This new foreign policy orientation helped Nepal reach distant countries without recriminations. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials had closely observed Nepal's conduct and offered technical aid to its government. Israel's expertise in agricultural technology and its experience in finding solutions to the security needs of Third World countries were of considerable importance to the Nepalese, who seized the opportunity to apply them to their beleaguered country.

Although the foundations of the bilateral relations were established prior to 1956, Nepal's new foreign policy orientation contributed to better mutual understanding. Several factors contributed to the establishment of solid relations between the two countries prior to the change mentioned earlier. Israel's experiment with a moderate type of socialism, which left the major enterprises under government control yet allowed a great extent of *laissez faire*, appealed to the Nepalese. Moreover, the Israeli experiment with the *moshav* and the *moshav shitufi*, as the cooperative and self-sufficient agricultural communities were called, was regarded as a model worthy of adoption by Nepal. Even the Israeli military system was regarded as 'most suited to Nepal'.³ As officials in Kathmandu saw it, the two countries were similar in many ways and thought that Nepal could benefit from Israeli expertise. So convinced were the Nepalese of the benefit that could accrue from the Israeli experience that when Sharett explained to the Nepalese Deputy Foreign Minister, during his trip to Nepal in 1956, that tiny Israel was too poor to compete with the United States in providing guidance and assistance to Nepal, his interlocutor responded that the United States lacked the practical experience that the Israelis had.⁴ Indeed, Israel could not match the aid extended to Nepal by any of the great powers, nor was that the intention. Israel's aid program was indispensable in that it was directed to certain sectors of the Nepalese economy in which Israeli experts had indispensable experience. Israeli participation in the resettlement of landless farmers in the hilly regions of Nepal was invaluable, as was the practice of bringing arid land under cultivation and the establishment of cooperatives and community organizations.

The first contact between the two countries dates back to the reign of King Tribhuvan. In 1952, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials met Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, who was destined to play a major role in Nepal's foreign policy in the meeting of the First Asian Socialist Conference held in Rangoon. Sharett was accompanied by other Foreign Ministry officials who represented Israel. When Sharett visited Nepal in 1956 he met Prime Minister Acharya Tanka Pratan, who had little knowledge of Israel and its unique problems in the Middle East. Little could be done to dissuade him from his conviction that Israel had a large population and therefore it sought to expand its boundaries at the expense of its neighboring Arab states. Consequently, his attitude toward Israel was negative from the outset. When asked about the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel he said that the matter required consideration and that in any case the Arabs could not be ignored in a future peace settlement. Sharett responded by telling the Nepalese Prime Minister that Israel sought diplomatic ties in order to prove to the Arabs that the world did not support them in their refusal to come to terms with Israel.⁵ When asked to clarify Nepal's position in that matter, Koirala made it clear that Nepal would

not deviate from India's position. That meeting was held prior to Nepal's decision to adopt its own version of nonalignment. The absence of formal ties with India convinced the Israelis that all attempts to convince the Nepalese government to establish diplomatic relations with Israel would be futile. Nepalese officials seemed unanimous in their determination not to upgrade the bilateral relations. Sharett raised the issue in his meeting with Nepal's Deputy Foreign Minister who told him that Nehru would not approve of such a move and thus made it clear that Nepal would follow the Indian example.⁶ Yet some Nepalese officials such as the Director General of the Foreign Ministry, V.B.Thapa, and N.P.Sinha had demonstrated keen interest in relations with Israel.

In 1958 Koirala visited Israel as a guest of the government and the Histadrut. He was accompanied by Tulsi Giri, who later became the Minister of Development. Shortly after his visit the Israelis thought that the time was opportune to raise the issue of formalizing the bilateral relations. They approached Koirala who agreed in principle but indicated that he feared a negative reaction from India and the Muslim world. In 1959 Nepal embarked on its first experiment with democracy. Koirala was elected Prime Minister but his position was far from being secure. Nevertheless, when Israel extended its hand in friendship he saw a great opportunity ahead. He welcomed the prospect of good relations with a country whose experiment in socialism he greatly admired. When the Weizmann Institute of Science held the Conference on National Development in Rehovot, Israel, Koirala was one of the few heads of state who decided to attend.⁷ Organized by Eban, this conference hosted representatives from 40 countries and proved to be a spectacular success. Seeking to avoid confrontation with India, the Nepalese Prime Minister stopped in New Delhi in order to explain the purpose of his visit. Apparently, India's pro-Arab government did not approve his pro-Israeli tendencies.⁸ Nevertheless, Koirala made his way to Israel, where he remained for ten days that were about to determine the fate of the bilateral relations. He met some of Mapai's members and visited the Histadrut's major enterprises. So impressed was Koirala with the Israeli experiment with democratic socialism that he described his experience as 'exhilarating'.⁹ In a conversation with M.Michael in Bombay, Nepal's Ambassador to Delhi, Lieutenant General Daman Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana, said, 'Our Prime Minister told me explicitly that Israel is one of the most interesting and important countries for us. We would very much like to establish full diplomatic relations with you; however, we cannot do that before India does.'¹⁰ According to a report by the British Embassy in Tel Aviv, a member of the Nepalese delegation to the United Nations, Vishna Bandu Tapa, who visited Israel in 1959, said that Koirala was Israel's Very effective Ambassador in Nepal'.¹¹

In the spring of 1960 Koirala wrote to Golda Meir saying that his government decided in principle to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and asked her to submit an official request.¹² Shortly afterwards he told Israeli officials that he had decided to raise the issue in the Nepalese Parliament. He reassured his listeners saying: 'It is now official and final. Should there be pressure from any quarters, there is no way back. Let us drink not only to friendship, but also to diplomatic relations between Israel and Nepal.'¹³ Koirala was quoted as saying, 'There is no reason why this should affect our relations with Arab countries.'¹⁴ Explaining the reasons for Nepal's decision, the British Ambassador said,

This is in line with a large series of moves which the government of Nepal has recently made apparently with the main object of broadening its contacts throughout the world in view of the possible threat of aggression of one sort or another which now seems to hang over the head of this country.¹⁵

That the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel had to wait until 1960 was in large measure due to Nepal's tendency to follow India's example by promoting Asian solidarity and expanding its contacts with Egypt. In June 1960 Israel and Nepal established diplomatic relations at an embassy level.¹⁶ Koirala visited Israel again in the summer of 1960 and expressed his country's interest in obtaining Israeli technical know-how.¹⁷ When a Nepalese delegation arrived in Israel in August 1960 its members asked Israeli experts to conduct an agricultural survey in Nepal. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials gave their request utmost priority.¹⁸ Deputy Defense Minister Peres told Koirala that Israel would be willing to enroll Nepalese officers in Israeli military training, to which Koirala responded with enthusiasm. Given his previous determination not to proceed with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel without India's consent, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials were stupefied. They interpreted his interest in Israel as an attempt to free his country from Indian influence.¹⁹

The two countries rapidly began to cooperate in the scientific, agricultural and military fields. Within a very short period of time the settlement projects in Nawalpur and Nepalgunj turned out to be an outstanding success. Israeli experts and agronomists provided the Nepalese with advice on every aspect of plant cultivation and tool fashioning. This was in addition to administrative advice which the Israelis provided to rural Nepalese communities. The Nepalese had soon learned that they could benefit from Israeli experience in arms manufacturing. They began purchasing the Israeli-manufactured Uzi submachine guns and sent their officers for training in Israel.²⁰

In his study of political parties, Maurice Duverger notes that after coming to power leftist parties tend to lose their revolutionary appetite and gradually lose their vitality.²¹ This is precisely what happened to the ruling parties in both countries. By the late 1950s and early 1960s both Mapai and the Congress Party were in a process of transformation. Under Koirala's leadership, the Congress Party abandoned its socialist orientation and became increasingly committed to liberalism and the market economy.²² The party's new orientation helped promote better relations with Israel. Koirala was impressed by Israel's achievements and called upon his people to learn from the Israelis.²³ Aware of the complexity of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Koirala proved to be a practical and astute statesman. He instructed the Nepalese visitors to learn as much as they could from the Israelis but to avoid comments regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁴ Nevertheless, his visit to Israel triggered a critical response from the Arab states. A Jordanian journalist wrote, 'Koirala joined the list of nations hostile to the Arabs.'²⁵ However, such criticism did not end the cooperation between the two countries and the normalization process continued.

The royal coup d'état that took place in Nepal on 15 December 1960 raised fears in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the bilateral relations were about to come to an end. Indeed, initially King Mahendra did not seem to show enthusiasm about his country's relations with the Jewish state. Accusations by Koirala's enemies that he was planning to establish

a military alliance with Israel in order to overthrow the King and restore the republic had further dissuaded the King from improving the bilateral relations.²⁶ The King suspected that Israel's assistance was intended to train the cadres of the Congress Party, largely because Israel agreed to train Koirala's aides. In addition, there were rumors that Israel had provided arms and munitions to Koirala as personal gifts but these rumors were never confirmed.²⁷ As it turned out, the King proved no less practical than Koirala and did not reject the Israeli offer to upgrade the bilateral relations. On the contrary, he announced that an embassy representing Israeli interests would be established in Rome.²⁸ When asked by the Israelis why the Nepalese government did choose not to upgrade its relations with Israel to the ambassadorial level Koirala responded that the decision to appoint an ambassador in Rome was motivated solely by fiscal considerations.²⁹ Likewise, Israel's Ambassador to Burma became the first non-resident Ambassador to Nepal. A former Nepalese Foreign Ministry spokesman had told Richard Kozicki privately that Nepal sought to avoid a severe reaction from the Arabs. Therefore, rather than sending a resident diplomat to Israel directly it decided to establish its new diplomatic mission in Rome in order to post that envoy concurrently to Tel Aviv.³⁰

As it turned out, Kathmandu's fears that rapprochement with Israel would jeopardize its position in Asia proved to be groundless. Its attempts to improve relations with Israel did not prove to be threatening to either India or China and did not lead to excessive tension in the region. The cooperation between Nepal and its northern neighbors seemed as smooth as ever after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel and the mutual visits by Nepalese and Israeli officials. This was largely due to the skill of the Israeli diplomats who cleverly managed to give that relationship the appearance of being peaceful and non-threatening. This was also the reason why Jerusalem tended to deny the Nepalese some of the military hardware that they had requested. All along, Israeli efforts were deliberately directed toward creating a relationship in which Israeli technical skill could be utilized in the industrial and agricultural sectors rather than in the military.

By the early 1960s, Israeli-Nepalese relations began to expand to numerous fields. Many Nepalese students arrived in Israel during the summer of 1961 and began to attend Israeli technical schools. In addition, Solel Boneh embarked on a project to build a runway at Gaucher Airport in Kathmandu.³¹ Impressed by the achievements of the Israeli construction efforts the Nepalese sought to establish a joint company. The negotiations led to the formation of the Joint National Company of Nepal in which the Nepalese government held 51 percent of the shares while Solel Boneh held 49 percent.³² The value of this project was that it gave the Nepalese the opportunity to acquire technical and organizational skills and to operate a national enterprise in an area previously under foreign management and foreign firms. There was some concern in Nepalese government circles that the Israeli directors would dominate the company. However, such fears proved groundless. By 1966, the company had US\$6 million-worth in contracts. Later, Israel sold its shares to the Nepalese government. Solel Boneh continued to offer advice and guidance when needed. Despite occasional disappointments the company performed well and thus helped promote the bilateral relations.

Probably the biggest stumbling block in the bilateral relations was the pressure exerted by Arab and Muslim countries on the Nepalese government not to cooperate with Israel. The pressure on Nepal to comply with the Arab boycott and to vote in favor of anti-

Israeli resolutions was unrelenting. Despite its close cooperation with Israel, the Nepalese government continued to insist that its policy remained neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict.³³ Such an explanation did not allay the fear of the Arab states, which sought to isolate Israel both politically and economically. The Nepalese government managed to skillfully avoid confrontation with the Arab states as it did with India and China. As future events were to prove, the Nepalese government was willing to pay no more than lip service to the Muslim world. Officials in Kathmandu attached such great value to their country's cooperation with Israel that they were willing to risk criticism from the Arab states. Nepal's pro-Israeli inclination manifested itself even in its voting habits in the United Nations. This was one of the ways of showing gratitude to Israel for its valuable assistance. Thus, for example, when the Belgrade Conference of Nonaligned Nations met in September 1961, Nepal joined Burma and others in helping defeat an anti-Israeli resolution. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials expressed their gratitude to their Nepalese counterparts and the efforts to provide Nepal with technical assistance continued without a challenge.³⁴

Aware of the intensity of Israeli-Nepalese ties, Arab representatives exerted efforts to drive a wedge between the two countries. However, the common rhetoric regarding the connection between Zionism and imperialism did not dissuade the Nepalese. Moreover, there was little that the Arab states could do to promote their relations with Nepal. The arguments that the UAR and other Arab countries were capable of supplying Nepal with all the technical aid it needed fell on deaf ears in Kathmandu. In December 1961 the Secretary of the Arab League visited Kathmandu in order to improve Arab-Nepalese ties.³⁵ However, the results were meager. Nepal never depended on Arab oil as Japan did and therefore the Arabs could do little to coerce it into changing its foreign policy orientation. The Nepalese seemed determined to exploit their connection with Israel to the fullest. Israelis were encouraged to expand their activities in Nepal and the projects undertaken by Solel Boneh increased considerably.³⁶ Moreover, Nepalese officials visited Israel several times and the bilateral relations continued to develop despite the domestic turmoil in Nepal.

Koirala's pro-Israeli policy was criticized not only by the Arab states but also by the Indian press. One editorial praised King Mahendra's policy of neutrality while denouncing Koirala's government for its collaboration with Israel and its imperialist allies. The writer concluded by saying, 'I like an autocratic neutral Nepal, [rather] than a PSP run Israel-modeled imperialist stooge Nepal, in between India and China.'³⁷ Following the coup that led to Koirala's arrest in late 1960, the King began reassessing the need to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel.³⁸ Yet despite his delaying tactics he was not willing to forgo the Israeli connection.³⁹ Nepal's cooperation with Israel continued while its officials were careful to avoid a conflict with the Arab states. When the United Nations passed a resolution dealing with the Palestinian refugee problem in the spring of 1961, the Nepalese representative voted with the Arab states. Nepalese officials argued that they did not see that step as an anti-Israeli action but simply acted according to their traditional policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Arab states.⁴⁰ In his meeting with Israeli Foreign Ministry officials in May 1961, Rishkesh Shaha argued that due to lack of specific instructions from the King, the Nepalese representatives were left with no choice but to vote according to Nepal's traditional

policy and therefore supported the Arabs. However, he reassured the Israelis that his country would abstain in the next UN resolution.⁴¹ Israeli officials remained skeptical and expressed strong disappointment but did not contemplate severing the ties.⁴² In response, the King assured the Israelis that he was very interested in close relations with Israel and in benefiting from its technical know-how. He added that he wished to make it clear that he was not going to let Arab machinations interfere with his relations with Israel.⁴³ At the same time, the Nepalese government continued to regard Israel as a friendly partner and asked it to support Nepal's candidacy to the UN Economic and Social Council.⁴⁴

Throughout all those years Israel sent experts to Nepal and Nepalese students came to attend professional schools in Israel. The training covered a wide variety of subjects such as agricultural engineering, food technology, community services and public administration. In addition, the trainees acquired military skills such as shooting and parachute jumping. Despite its meager resources Israel provided scholarships to Nepalese students and conducted on-the-spot training programs in Nepal. Provided by the Itinerant Training School, this program was extremely valuable to the Nepalese.

In September 1963 King Mahendra came to Israel where he met Shazar. The King inspected a number of development projects in Israel, including military installations and an arms factory. During the visit, the King and his host expressed their support for the independence and integrity of all nations. Shazar took the opportunity to extend another invitation to the King. Disgruntled by his refusal to cancel his trip, Arab diplomats expressed their displeasure by not attending state banquets given in his honor in India. Subsequent attempts by the Arabs to dissuade the Nepalese government seemed partially successful in that the criticism against the King mounted following the visit. The Nepalese press intensified its campaign against the government's pro-Israeli policy but not all newspapers held pro-Arab views. Editorials in the press argued that although there was nothing wrong with friendly relations with the Jewish state, Nepal was in no position to alienate so many Arab states and wondered whether or not the government could have obtained aid from the UAR instead. However, most editorials praised the King's pro-Israeli diplomacy and some even argued that Nepal should follow India's example and not sever its relations with Israel.⁴⁵ But not all was well in the bilateral relations. Some Nepalese officials were openly dissatisfied with the Israeli connection. They resented the fact that the Israelis remained reluctant to share their military know-how with them. When Giri raised the possibility of building a factory for the production of Uzi submachine guns in Nepal, Golda Meir was skeptical about the project.⁴⁶ However, when Kathmandu requested that Israel send a Histadrut adviser to guide the Nepalese Labor Organization on matters of labor disputes the Israeli government responded with alacrity.⁴⁷

Israel's willingness to assist Nepal yielded handsome political benefits. When the issue of the Palestinian refugees was raised at the Nonaligned Conference held in Cairo in September 1963, Nepal fulfilled its promise and abstained. In the spring of 1966, Shazar visited Nepal and was told by Nepalese officials that they were highly impressed by the expertise of the Israelis in construction and agriculture.⁴⁸ Although his sojourn in India was not as smooth as it could have been, his visit to Nepal was crowned with success. Shazar met the King and the two issued a joint communiqué calling for the eradication of

the vestiges of colonialism. Moreover, they agreed to continue to enhance the bilateral relations. The visit provided the Nepalese with the opportunity to realize that they were in fact capable of pursuing their foreign policy objectives without regard to New Delhi's wishes. This assertion of Nepalese independence was expressed again in June 1966, when Nepal refused to devalue its rupee to conform to the devaluation of the Indian rupee.

Nepal's decision to send its personnel for military training in Israel triggered critical remarks in the Arab world. When Reuters reported from Cairo that China and Pakistan had expressed their disapproval of Nepal's action, officials in Kathmandu denied the veracity of the announcement.⁴⁹ They were concerned not only about the reaction of Nepal's neighbors but also about the impact that it could have on Israel's willingness to continue the cooperation. Therefore, they continued to reassure the Israelis that the bilateral relations would not be adversely affected as a result of their attempts to maintain normal relations with the Arab countries. When Nepal decided to open an Embassy in Egypt, officials in Kathmandu reassured the Israelis that they had no intention of downgrading the bilateral relations. However, Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem were concerned that opening an Embassy in Egypt before opening one in Israel would be interpreted by the Arabs as a sign of deterioration in Israeli-Nepalese relations.⁵⁰ Therefore, Shazar appealed to the King to open an Embassy in Jerusalem as a counterweight to Nepal's Embassy in Egypt.⁵¹ The response from Egypt was quick and unequivocal. The Egyptian Ambassador warned that close cooperation with Israel would have grave consequences for Nepal's relations with the entire Muslim world. Realizing that it was futile to try to dissuade the Nepalese from opening an Embassy in Cairo, Israeli officials tried to convince them to open one in Adis Ababa instead.⁵²

Nepal took great pride in the fact that its relations with Israel had no adverse effect on its ties with the Arab states. A booklet published by the Nepalese government read in part: 'The special importance of the growing intimacies of the Nepal and Israel nations lies in the fact that Nepal is one of the few countries that has equally warm and cordial ties with both Israel and the Arab League countries.'⁵³ However, despite the attempt to appear neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict some of the statements made by Nepalese officials clearly favored Israel. For example, in a joint communiqué with Ne Win in December 1966, the King stated that 'the situation in Jordan and the parts played by Arab neighbors are contributing more to periodic explosions in the Arab world than Israeli adventurism'.⁵⁴

Nepal's determination to act independently manifested itself clearly in the aftermath of the Six Day War. Whereas the Indian government remained decidedly pro-Arab in its attitude toward the conflict the Nepalese position remained conciliatory toward Israel. The Nepalese government expressed its grave concern over the situation in the Middle East; however at the same time it voiced its opposition to any attempt aimed at the destruction of the State of Israel.⁵⁵ This was the official position adopted by Deputy Prime Minister K.Bista in his discussions with the Israeli Ambassador in Kathmandu. The Nepalese delegate at the UN was clearly pro-Israeli and it was only later that he decided to vote with the nonaligned group that called for a negotiated settlement to the Middle East crisis.⁵⁶

The Nepalese leaders expressed support for Israel. However, they argued that their vote in the United Nations had to be pro-Arab for the most part because they did not wish

to remain isolated among the countries surrounding them.⁵⁷ The Director General of the Nepalese Foreign Ministry maintained a unique view among most Asian countries saying that Israel should not withdraw from the occupied territories before a reasonable settlement with the Arab countries was reached.⁵⁸ The King was reported to have held a similar opinion. He firmly supported Israel's demand for face-to-face negotiations.⁵⁹ However, most Nepalese officials believed that Israel should withdraw from the territories following the peace negotiations.⁶⁰ Bista had explicitly told Israeli diplomats that while Israel had the right to exist as a nation, it had to withdraw from occupied Arab land.⁶¹ The official statements of the Nepalese government were carefully worded to ward off criticism from the Arab states. A Nepalese government newspaper remarked that 'Nepal's viewpoint of West Asia differed considerably from stands of many nonaligned countries including India, Egypt and Yugoslavia. Nepal's stand is the outcome of the principle that issues must be judged on merits and not on the basis of bloc solidarity.'⁶² Bearing this view in mind it was little wonder that the Nepalese representative did not vote in favor of sanctions against Israel.⁶³ Moreover, in his meeting with the Israeli Foreign Minister, the King said that his government would do its utmost to stand by Israel's side. Aware of Nepal's need to maintain normal relations with the Arab states the Israeli government maintained a low profile and did not exert excessive pressure. The Israeli Foreign Minister told of ficials in Kathmandu that Israel would be satisfied if Nepal maintained neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶⁴

The predominantly pro-Israeli attitude of many Nepalese can be explained by the fact that the Muslim community in Nepal remained small and lacked much influence.⁶⁵ Many Nepalese regarded Israel as a small country surviving attempts aimed at its destruction. Editorials in the press argued that the sole aim of all Arab nations was to destroy the Jewish state. One argued that, 'if Israel was defeated its existence will be wiped out. If the Arab nations are defeated, nothing serious will happen.'⁶⁶

Nepal became active while the Six Day War was still going on. It participated in UN efforts to restore peace in the war-torn Middle East. Major General Padma Bahadur Khatri, the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations stated that his government's policy was to maintain 'the friendliest of relations both with Israel and the Arab world'. He added that while his delegation was opposed to 'forcible occupation' of territory by any country it deplored 'attempts directed towards the extinction of a state... or a continuous state of belligerency'. He concluded his speech by saying that no state can remain calm when its existence is threatened and recommended that the United Nations should take part in the rehabilitation of the Palestinian refugees. Moreover, he concurred with Israel's position that the only way to solve the Middle East crisis was by face-to-face negotiations, but insisted that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories and that the superpowers should cease to interfere in Middle Eastern affairs.⁶⁷

When India and Yugoslavia sponsored a resolution calling for a total withdrawal of all Israeli forces to the positions held before the Six Day War, Nepal abstained. Later, however, Nepal's position became somewhat more critical of Israel. The failure of Gunnar Jarring's mission and the Israeli retaliation campaigns against Egypt and Jordan led to increased criticism in the Nepalese press. Moreover, Israel's decision to hold its Independence Day Parade in Jerusalem was seen as an act of defiance not only against the Arabs but also against the United Nations.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the bilateral relations did

not suffer a severe crisis. In September 1968, Crown Prince Birenda Bir Bikram Shah Dev came for a two-week visit to Israel. This was another Nepalese attempt to demonstrate to India that Nepal was pursuing its own brand of nonalignment.⁶⁹ However, this visit came after a period of considerable hesitation. Originally planned for mid-1968, the visit was delayed until the autumn of that year. Prince Birenda met Eban and other Israeli officials, but the visit lacked the warmth of Mahendra's visit five years earlier.

The end of 1968 marked a new phase in the bilateral relations. This was not only because Israel sold its shares in the joint company but also because Nepal was elected to succeed India as the Asian representative on the Security Council, which meant that its representative had to play a seemingly more objective role. Adding to these changes were the events in the Middle East—the intense diplomatic campaign of the Arab states and the PLO, the building of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and Israel's retaliation campaigns which continued relentlessly against Palestinian bases throughout the Middle East. These events increased the pressure on the Nepalese government, while editorials in the press became highly critical of Israel. The Palestinian resistance in the occupied territories had further intensified that criticism. Nepalese public opinion could not stay indifferent to the sight of stone-throwing youth in the West Bank and Gaza.

The resistance in the occupied territories left the Nepalese government torn between its desire to continue demonstrating to India that it was determined to follow an independent foreign policy and the need to avoid criticism from the entire Muslim world. Therefore, the years that followed the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War witnessed a far more cautious diplomacy on the part of the Nepalese government. The cooperation between the two countries continued but they lacked the pomp and circumstance of earlier. The Nepalese King had to remain cautious in his pro-Israeli policy. His experience had repeatedly taught him that he could go only so far in his attempt to demonstrate his country's independence. India's victory in the war with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in the early 1970s had demonstrated to the Nepalese that a defiant action or an extravagant show of independence could have severe consequences for their country's independence. When India brought Sikkim more closely under its control in 1974, by turning the Chogyal into a figurehead and making Sikkim an associate state of the Indian republic, with representatives in both houses of the parliament, the Nepalese King was alarmed, and later India's power manifested itself with no less fortitude during the 1980s. When the Nepalese government concluded an arms deal with China in 1988, the Indians expressed their strong disapproval, and when its trade agreement with Nepal expired in the following year New Delhi retaliated by closing 13 of the 15 border points between the two countries, thereby imposing an embargo that caused much economic distress in Nepal and intensified opposition to the King's rule. Again, riots in Kathmandu in 1990 reminded the King of his dependence on India. Fortunately, the Indian government began warming to Israel, thus allowing the Nepalese to remain on good terms with Israel. Moreover, the Indian economy underwent a rapid transformation from socialism to a market economy. Although never officially disposed of as the state's doctrine, nonalignment lost much of its appeal and the rhetoric regarding the connection between Zionism and imperialism was no longer in vogue even in the Arab states, some of which began privatizing their economies and turning their back on outmoded symbols and old shibboleths that had been popular during the heyday of the Cold War. Consequently,

Israeli-Nepalese relations were no longer viewed with disfavor in New Delhi.

Subsequent events proved to be a blessing to the future of the bilateral relations. By the late 1980s the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War came to an end. Palestinians and Israelis began facing each other at the negotiating table. Both India and China began normalizing relations with Israel. Thus, the Nepalese government became free from pressure exerted by its giant neighbors and the Muslim world and began pursuing its foreign policy objectives in the Middle East in an overt manner. The visit by Girija Prasad Koirala to Israel in November 1993 did not cause any problem in Sino-Nepalese relations.⁷⁰ In November of that year Nepal's Minister of Agriculture Ram Chandra Poudel arrived in Israel to learn more about Israeli agricultural practices.⁷¹ And what made the cooperation particularly beneficial from Israel's point of view was Nepal's willingness to act as a mediator in Israeli-Pakistani relations.⁷²

Israeli-Nepalese relations were to a large extent determined by Nepal's geographical position. Tucked as it was between India and China, the tiny Himalayan state was compelled to pursue a low-profile connection with Israel. The political and ideological orientation of these great powers was such that any overt connection with the Jewish state could antagonize them both. Nepal's association with the developing Third World countries whose leaders were committed to nonalignment in foreign affairs prevented it from openly dealing with a country which they associated with imperialism. The Nepalese public was never entirely free from the anti-Zionist rhetoric, which equated Zionism and imperialism. Moreover, Nepal's sensitivity to Muslim pressure and its desire to accommodate the Arab states had acted as a formidable constraint on its foreign policy. There were domestic constraints as well. The conflict between King Mahendra and Koirala threatened to destroy the foundations of Israeli-Nepalese ties. Yet the economic imperatives in a developing country like Nepal were so formidable that its government could not disregard what the Israelis could do in the agricultural and technical fields. Perhaps there was some truth in the arguments of Arab representatives that their countries could supply Nepal with the same services rendered to them by the Israelis. However, no serious attempt was made by the Arab states to coordinate their efforts in this matter and their arguments were not translated into action. Nor could the Arabs pressure Nepal by raising the price of oil. Unlike many great powers, the Nepalese economy remained rural and there was little reliance on that black, combustible liquid which caused Japan to downgrade its relations with Israel in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. Yet unlike Burma, whose government gave publicity to its ties with Israel, Kathmandu remained reticent. The contacts with Israel received little coverage in the press. So careful were Nepal's leaders to emphasize that their intention was to coordinate their foreign policy with India that they refrained from any expressions of overt recognition of the Jewish state.

The events that followed the Six Day War had a hardening effect on the Nepalese government. When the Intifada broke out in the occupied territories and the Palestinian issue began to loom large in Middle Eastern affairs, the pressure on Kathmandu was even more formidable. Moreover, although Israel supplied most of Nepal's needs in agricultural and technical aid, officials in Jerusalem remained reluctant to extend military aid. Fortunately, however, Nepal still benefited a great deal from the Israeli assistance. The small size of the country made the Israeli assistance visible and, despite their

awareness of the magnitude of that assistance, neither India nor China seemed to have been bothered by it. However, overt relations were a different matter. Nepal, whose leaders had constantly vowed not to pursue their foreign policy objectives without regard to the wishes of their powerful neighbors, had to wait until those decided to upgrade their relations with Israel and then follow suit. So far the faltering peace process and the outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa have not had an adverse effect on the bilateral relations; however, the Nepalese government found it prudent to avoid an excessive show of solidarity with Israel.

It is tempting to think that the eclipse of the monarchy and the rise of democracy was a catalyst to better relations between the two countries, particularly since the bilateral relations improved considerably following the events of 1960, when King Mahendra incarcerated the entire cabinet of the first elected government.⁷³ It is also possible to argue that the success of the *Janā-Śakti* (Peoples Power) during the 1990 revolution led to greater openness in Nepalese foreign policy.⁷⁴ Perhaps the evolution of Nepalese-Israeli relations during the next decade may provide evidence for such an argument.

NOTES

1. Shortly after ascending the Nepalese throne King Birenda announced his government's foreign policy objectives. Foremost among these was his determination to reinforce the spirit of nonalignment. King Birenda Reply Speech at the Reception Held by the Nepal Council of World Affairs, Kathmandu, 26 July 1973. Cited in Yugeshwar P. Verma, *Nepal: Progress and Problems 1972–1980* (Kathmandu: Chamundra Press, 1981), pp. 106–7.
2. Leo E. Rose and John T. Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1974), p. 123.
3. *Shalom*, No. 6 (December 1963), pp. 25–6.
4. Moshe Sharett, *Traveling in Asia* (Tel Aviv: Ahdut, 1957), p. 159 [Hebrew].
5. Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2561/5, 2 November 1956.
6. Sharett, *Traveling in Asia*, p. 159.
7. Eban, *An Autobiography*, p. 277.
8. Richard J. Kozicki, 'Nepal and Israel: Uniqueness in Asian Relations', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May 1969), p. 332.
9. *The Statesman*, 1 September 1960.
10. Michael to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3331/19, 18 February 1960.
11. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 151183, VR103821, 6 January 1960.
12. Koirala to Meir, ISA 3331/19, 15 April 1960.
13. Dagan to Shimoni, ISA 3331/19, 17 April 1960.
14. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 151183, VR10382/2, 31 May 1960.
15. British Embassy in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, PRO FO/371, 151183, VR10382, 27 June 1960.
16. 'The Kingdom of Nepal: Our Friend at the Foot of the Himalayas', *Monthly*

Survey, No. 8 (August 1965), p. 27.

17. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 August 1960.

18. 'Survey of Agricultural Development in Nepal, addressed by Aharon Remez, Director of Mashav, to Gad Yaakoby, Assistant to the Minister for Economic Affairs', 17 August 1960, in Hanan and Shimon (eds), *Thirty Years of Israel's International Technical Assistance*, p. 320.

19. Shimoni to Israeli Ambassador in Rangoon, ISA 3331/19, 31 August 1960.

20. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3331/21, 25 October 1960.

21. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 16–18.

22. A similar process occurred in Israel. By the late 1960s the ideology of Labor Zionism began losing its appeal and middle-class values were gaining wider acceptance.

23. Kedar to Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3322/39, 13 November 1960.

24. Foreign Ministry Memorandum on the Visit by Members of the Nepalese Parliament, ISA 3322/39, 25 November 1960.

25. *Falastin*, 17 December 1960.

26. Kozickii, 'Nepal and Israel', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 332.

27. Narayan Khadka, *Foreign Aid, Poverty and Stagnation in Nepal* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1991), p. 175.

28. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3331/21, 24 March 1961.

29. *Ibid.*, 25 October 1961.

30. Kozicki, 'Nepal and Israel', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 333.

31. Lador to Israeli Ambassador in Rangoon, ISA 3331/21, 9 October 1961; 27 July 1961.

32. Khadka, *Foreign Aid*, p. 175.

33. Lador to Shimoni, ISA 3331/24, 2 August 1961.

34. Ivor Barelle, 'Israel and Neutralism', *The Israel Digest*, Vol. 4, No. 20 (1961), pp. 2, 8.

35. Lador to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3331/24, 2 December 1961.

36. Koirala to Meir, ISA 3331/19, 8 November 1960.

37. *Free Press Bulletin*, 11 January 1961.

38. Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3331/19, 12 March 1961.

39. Ambassador in Rangoon to Shimoni, ISA 3331/19, 29 March 1961.

40. Lador to Shimoni, ISA 3331/19, 24 April 1961.

41. Comay to Shimoni, ISA 3331/19, 17 May 1961.

42. Foreign Ministry to Embassy in Rangoon, ISA 3331/19, 28 April 1961.

43. Lador to Shimoni, ISA 3331/19, 8 May 1961.

44. Nepalese Foreign Affairs Ministry to Israeli Embassy at Kathmandu, ISA 3424/11, 24 January 1962.

45. Kozicki, 'Nepal and Israel', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 336.

46. Dar to Defense Ministry, ISA 3424/11, 16 December 1963.

47. Aynor, Avimor and Kaminer (eds), *The Role of the Israel Labour Movement*, Document No. IV 219A-1-139C, p. 62.

48. *Hatzofe*, 24 March 1966; 'A Joint Communiqué', ISA 4045/3, 15–22 March 1966.

49. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 10 March 1966.

50. Foreign Ministry to Embassy in Kathmandu, ISA 4045/3, 1 June 1966.
51. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1966.
52. Avriel to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 6 June 1966.
53. Mukunda Prasad Dhungel, *Nepal-Israel Relations* (Nepal: His Majesty's Government, Department of Publicity, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, March 1966), p. 9.
54. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045, 2 December 1966.
55. Sita Shrestha, 'Nepal in the United Nations', in S.D.Muni (ed.), *Nepal: An Assertive Monarchy* (New Delhi: Chetana Publications, 1977), p. 168.
56. Tribhuvan Nath, *The Nepalese Dilemma 1960–74* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1975), p. 314.
57. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 25 October 1967.
58. *Ibid.*, 6 September 1967; *The Rising Nepal* (Kathmandu), 5 September 1967.
59. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 8 September 1967.
60. Arbelle to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 14 September 1967.
61. *Times of India*, 16 September 1967.
62. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4045/3, 17 September 1967.
63. *Ibid.*, 19 September 1967.
64. Lewin to Er'el, ISA 4045/3, 14 November 1967.
65. The number of Muslims in 1971 was 3.04 percent of a total population of slightly over 11.5 million Nepalese. Shamima Siddika, *Muslims of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Gazela Siddika, 1993), p. 138.
66. Cited in Kozicki, 'Nepal and Israel', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 5, p. 339.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 339–40.
68. *Nepal Times*, 1 May 1968.
69. Rose and Scholz, *Nepal*, p. 129.
70. *Jerusalem Post*, 23 June 1993.
71. *Ibid.*, 18 November 1993.
72. A Nepalese minister said that his government 'brokered' Pakistani-Israeli relations. *Ibid.*, 21 November 1993.
73. James F. Fisher with Tanka Prasad Acharya and Rewanta Kumari Acharya, *Living Martyrs: Individuals and Revolution in Nepal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 1 n1.
74. For the success of the 1990 revolution and its impact on the Nepalese state see Vivienne Kondos, 'Janā-Śakti (Peoples Power) and the 1990 Revolution in Nepal: Some Theoretical Considerations', in Michael Allen (ed.), *Anthropology of Nepal: Peoples, Problems and Processes* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1994), pp. 271–86.

Part V
The Muslim States of Asia

Pakistan—Between Pragmatism and Islam

Although Pakistan remains one of the last Asian countries whose leaders still refuse to establish diplomatic relations with Israel the two countries seem to have more in common than one might realize. Israel is a stable democratic society compared to Pakistan, which has experienced autocracy as well as democracy. Nevertheless, similarities do exist. Both countries share a common British colonial past and both became major recipients of US foreign aid. Both found it necessary to invest enormous resources in national security in order to defend their existence amongst hostile neighbors and to prevent encroachments on their territories.¹ And what is more unusual than all these similarities was that both were founded on religious ideologies—Judaism and Islam.² Moreover, both countries had powerful opposition groups that had constantly discouraged the normalization process by their actions or verbal assaults. Despite the absence of a direct conflict and the lack of a common border between the two countries there was strong and persistent reluctance in Islamabad to recognize the Jewish state. The Pakistani media's portrayal of Israel as an expansionist country determined to undermine all efforts at Arab unity remained ingrained in the Pakistani mind and thus made it impossible even for moderate politicians in Islamabad to advocate normalization with Israel.³ Nevertheless, contacts between the two countries existed even before the establishment of the Jewish state. There were numerous meetings of Israeli diplomats with their Pakistani counterparts in the capitals of Europe and, despite the rabid tone of the official declarations which emanated from Islamabad, the two countries cooperated on numerous occasions.

Like Indonesia and Malaysia, Pakistan did not loom large in the eyes of Israeli Foreign Ministry officials until the early 1990s, when they began to invest efforts in approaching Islamabad. It was only after Israel normalized its relations with most Asian countries that Pakistan began to loom large on Israel's foreign policy agenda. Islamabad's nuclear test in May 1998 alerted the Israelis to the danger of a hostile Pakistan and underscored the need for normalization. Given its solidarity with the Muslim world there was fear in Jerusalem that Pakistan might decide to share its nuclear know-how with Iran, Iraq and other radical Arab states. Although Pakistan is the third most populated Muslim country after Bangladesh and Indonesia it is by far the most powerful of all Muslim states in the region. Pakistan's pro-Western orientation facilitated the contacts between the two countries. An additional motive for Israel's recent efforts to approach Pakistan was the desire to obtain its support for the peace process, particularly in view of the fact that the future of Jerusalem was seen as the thorniest item in future peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Moreover, Israel sought normalization in order to counter the pressure of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Pakistan. However, from Islamabad's viewpoint, establishing relations with Israel presented serious domestic problems. Many Pakistanis continue to see Israel as a menace to peace in the Middle East. They oppose

Israel's continued occupation of Arab land, and Jerusalem in particular. Moreover, Israel's improved relations with India and the opposition of both countries to Islamabad's nuclear program cause considerable tension between the two countries. Islamabad has become so determined to obtain nuclear weapons that any attempt by India or Israel to sabotage its efforts is regarded with suspicion and hostility. This remains one of the major obstacles on the way to normalization. The Pakistani media have claimed all along that Mossad agents were involved in an attempt to destroy Pakistan's nuclear facilities in Kahuta. In addition, Israel is being perceived as collaborating with India in an attempt to suppress popular uprisings in the Indian-controlled Kashmir region. The above-mentioned factors, however, are not enough to explain the difficulties involved in the normalization process. It is therefore necessary to trace the bilateral relations to earlier days.

Pakistan's interest in the Jewish question can be traced back to the beginning of the century. After learning about the Balfour Declaration in which the British government announced its willingness to support the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine the Muslim League expressed concern about the sanctity of the holy places in Jerusalem. The leader of the Muslim League, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, condemned the Balfour Declaration and called upon the British to abandon their commitment to the Jews.⁴ During the first year of its existence as an independent state, Pakistan did not formulate a clear policy toward the Middle East, a state of affairs which led the British to believe that they were in a position to influence Islamabad's policy toward the Middle East. Shortly before Britain's withdrawal from the subcontinent, the High Commissioner in Rawalpindi informed the Foreign Office that the British government had a unique opportunity to orient Pakistan's Middle East policy.⁵ However, it is doubtful whether the British government could have done much to alter the course of Israeli-Pakistani relations even if it had exerted efforts in that direction. Jews in Palestine and throughout the world had long been active in the attempt to obtain Pakistan's recognition of the Zionist enterprise. Prominent Jews like Edmund de Rothschild used their contacts and fortune to reach Islamabad.⁶ However, these efforts this did not convince the Pakistani government to recognize Israel. Nevertheless, the contacts between Jewish and Pakistani leaders continued. In 1945, Zafrulla Khan, who led the Muslim representatives in the United Nations in opposition to the Partition Plan, visited Palestine where he met Chaim Weizmann who later became Israel's first President. Zafrulla told Weizmann that the problem of Palestine was 'much more complicated than I imagined' and he expressed hope that a just solution would soon be found.⁷ However, when the Palestine question was debated in the General Assembly in 1947, Zafrulla argued that the Balfour Declaration, which granted the Jews the right to a national home, contradicted earlier commitments made by Great Britain to promote Arab independence in all of Palestine. He said that Palestine belonged to the Palestinian Arabs and that all Jewish refugees should have been sent to the countries of their origin.⁸ When the Partition Plan was brought to discussion in the United Nations in 1947, Zafrulla represented the opponents who argued that the plan had no validity since it was rejected by the Arab states.⁹ Moreover, he argued that the United Nations had no legal authority to partition Palestine, and when the opposition to the Partition Plan failed he sought to limit the size of the Jewish state. When asked why his country, which had faced a similar situation in its early

days, decided not to recognize the Jewish state, Zafrulla, who had become Foreign Minister by then, said that while the population in Pakistan at the time of its creation was 80 million there were barely over 500,000 Jews in Palestine. He argued that the Pakistani territory was far larger than that of Palestine and that unlike Palestine, both India and Pakistan agreed to partition. He added that unlike the Jewish community in Palestine, which was artificially created by foreign immigrants, the Muslim minority in India was an integral part of the population and that the Muslims in India claimed only those regions in which they constituted the majority as opposed to Jews who were a minority in all parts of Palestine, except in Jaffa.¹⁰ However, shortly afterwards, Zafrulla changed his opinion and thought that partition was the only solution to the problem. He even called upon the Arabs to allow the establishment of a Jewish state.¹¹

Hoping that Zafrulla's newly adopted position would lead to normalization between the two countries, Weizmann had written that he was hopeful that Pakistan, which shared so many problems with the Jewish state, would agree to cooperate with it. The two leaders met in New York on 12 April 1948, but the meeting did not change the Pakistani government's objections to partition. Yet there was some hope in Jerusalem that the rivalry between India and Pakistan would bring the latter to recognize Israel. This was how Eban interpreted the attitude of the Pakistani representative in the United States. He writes in one of his letters, 'The Pakistani representative at the UN was scheming to embarrass India by bringing his government to recognize Israel before India did.'¹² Commenting on Pakistan's opposition to Israel's participation at the Bandung Conference, Menon had this to say:

Pakistan made use of our attitude to Israel's presence at Bandung in propaganda with the Arabs. The Burmese were difficult at first. They said 'we won't come without Israel'. We said our position is the same but we have got to carry the Arabs with us. We will do whatever the Conference agrees but we will vote for the invitation of Israel. And we were three to two, Ceylon, Burma and India for, and Pakistan and Indonesia against; but Pakistan was the leader. They made propaganda against us and issued leaflets terming us a pro-Jewish country.¹³

What would have been the nature of Israeli-Pakistani relations in the absence of the Indo-Pakistani conflict is difficult to say, but it is definitely true that Pakistan's Middle East policy was determined to no small extent by its conflict with India.¹⁴ Throughout the entire era of the Jewish state's existence Pakistan viewed India's influence in the Middle East with misgivings. Pakistani leaders were not in a position to establish ties with Israel during the era of Pan-Arabism, when India's influence in the Arab world increased and the Indo-Egyptian rapprochement reached its zenith. But even then, when it seemed that the entire Third World was nonaligned and hostile to Israel, contacts between Pakistan and Israel continued beneath the surface.

Zafrulla's position toward Israel remained favorable. During his visit to Egypt in February 1952, he referred to Israel as 'a limb in the body of the Middle East' and called upon the Arabs to reach a peaceful settlement.¹⁵ Pakistani representatives, who met their Israeli counterparts in the United Nations in the spring of 1952, stated that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved by international guarantees against Israeli expansion

beyond its present borders and by protecting the markets of the Middle East from Israeli domination. However, to the astonishment of the Israelis, they did not demand that Israel accept the Palestinian refugees but recommended compensation instead.¹⁶ When Eban met Zafrulla in New York on 14 January 1953, the latter said that improved relations with Israel had become impossible because the new government of Khwaja Nazimuddin, which replaced that of Liaquat Ali in 1951, was weaker and more susceptible to pressure from Muslim elements.¹⁷

According to one Pakistani official, Ahmed Naik, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry consisted of three groups: (a) dogmatic supporters of the Muslim League who sympathized entirely with the Arab cause; (b) supporters of the League whose mind was open and were ready to change their attitude toward Israel based on changing circumstances; and (c) a limited number of progressive idealists who were willing to improve ties with Israel and to learn from its achievements. The latter group held opinions that were unacceptable to the policy-makers.¹⁸ This became clear from the frequent announcements made by Pakistani officials. In an interview to journalists in Karachi in April 1954 Zafrulla said that Pakistan would support the Arabs in defense of Palestine and that Israel constituted a threat to peace in the Middle East. He reassured his listeners that Pakistan did not recognize Israel and had no intention of doing so.¹⁹

Given this aversion to the newly created state of Israel, one would have automatically expected cordial relations between Pakistan and the Arab states. Indeed, Islamabad regarded the Arab states as natural allies and its attempts to gain their friendship were intensified following Israel's establishment. However, there was considerable opposition from many pragmatic Pakistanis who regarded their country as far more advanced and enlightened than the Arab states and called upon their government to be more discriminating. Even the Muslim League's organ, *Dawn* was not in agreement with the government's eagerness to warm to the Arab states. Its editor called upon the Pakistani intelligentsia to realize that 'Pakistan is not adding to its prestige in the international field by running after certain other countries which are economically and otherwise in a far less stable position than Pakistan itself.'²⁰ As future events were to demonstrate, Pakistan had opted for a foreign policy orientation which placed it at the center of a pro-British alliance and thus alienated itself not only from Israel but also from the Arabs. This resulted in damage which Islamabad painstakingly tried to repair in the years to come. As it turned out, however, Israel did not end up being the beneficiary of the Pakistani-Arab dispute. Pakistan's participation in the British-designed Baghdad Pact with Iran, Iraq and Turkey in 1955 was not regarded favorably in Jerusalem and Foreign Ministry officials feared that if the pact became reality the Middle East would turn into a British condominium hostile to Israel.²¹

For all these years, the two countries did not maintain diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, sporadic contacts did take place. Whenever possible Israeli Foreign Ministry officials demonstrated signs of good will toward Islamabad. There was little expectation in Jerusalem that a major breakthrough would occur in the diplomatic arena but even occasional contacts in marginal areas were regarded as confidencebuilding measures that could some day lead to normalization between the two countries. Occasional expressions of good will from Israel continued throughout the years. Thus, for example, Pakistanis wishing to enter the country for study purposes were given

permission to do so. In January 1954, the Haifa municipality allowed the Pakistani government official, Sherif Ul Haq, to enter Israel in order to study social programs, particularly those related to refugee rehabilitation.²² The cooperation between the two countries could have expanded further but as it turned out, the political developments in the stormy Middle East during the mid-1950s had a crippling effect even on such modest contacts.

Nasser's dispute with Great Britain and France during the Suez Affair forced Pakistan to take a stand. Although Pakistan supported Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, it joined 17 other countries, including Great Britain and France, in advocating international management of the Canal's operation in cooperation with Egypt. When Egypt's dispute with Israel was discussed at the Second Suez Conference in September 1956, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Feroz Khan Noon said that 'Israel is a reality' and that, 'we cannot push 1.5 million Jews into the Mediterranean'. This statement triggered a critical response from Egypt and other Arab countries. Nevertheless, Pakistani diplomats did not hide their sympathy for Israel. Thus, for example, when Canada gave a reception in Nehru's honor on 23 December 1956, both the Israeli and the Pakistani ambassadors were invited. According to the Israeli Ambassador Michael S. Comay the Pakistani Ambassador congratulated him on Israel's success in the Sinai Campaign and said that he regretted that the British and the French intervened and thus prevented Israel from reaching Cairo. When asked why his government still maintained a hostile attitude toward Israel the Pakistani Ambassador said that not all Pakistanis identified with their government's policy and that many realized that Nasser was a menace to peace in the region. Moreover, he suggested that Turkey could be used as a mediator between Jerusalem and Islamabad.²³

Faced with tremendous domestic opposition, Prime Minister H.S. Suharwardy issued a statement denying that his country ever recognized the State of Israel and promised that it never would. He also took the opportunity to denounce Israel's collusion with Great Britain and France in the Suez Affair.²⁴ Yet even then Islamabad's attitude was not entirely anti-Israel. This was partly because the Suez Affair did not eliminate all obstacles that stood in the way of Pakistani-Arab understanding. The Pakistani government resented Nasser's decision to allow India, which recognized Israel, to participate in the UN Emergency Force along the Israeli-Egyptian border while rejecting Pakistan's request to participate in the same force.²⁵

Later, when the dust over the Suez Affair had settled, the anti-Israeli remarks in the Pakistani press diminished considerably. General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq went to the extent of saying that 'Israel is a reality'.²⁶ Apart from occasional pro-Arab statements which were issued for public consumption and in order to pacify the Islamic militants at home, the Pakistani government remained quite indifferent to the events in the Middle East despite the radical tone of Nasser's statements and the fact that Pan-Arabism reached its climax at that time. Officials in Islamabad were not entirely supportive of Nasser's aspiration to dominate the Muslim world. His claim in *The Philosophy of the Revolution* that Egypt played a leading role in the Arab, African and Islamic circles was not well received in Islamabad. A thorough analysis of Pakistani foreign policy shows that Islamabad was far more concerned about its national security and the events that occurred in the Indian subcontinent than it was about Middle Eastern affairs. The

Pakistani government remained sensitive to any Israeli step that would put it at a disadvantage vis-à-vis India. As long as Israel did not take provocative action by supporting India against Pakistan there was little danger that its relations with Pakistan would deteriorate. In 1962 the Pakistani press reported that Israel had sold arms to India and it was obvious that the Israeli decision would cause uproar in Pakistani government circles. The criticism against Israel, which had been subdued since the late 1950s, mounted considerably.²⁷ The optimists among the Pakistanis regarded the sale as an Israeli attempt to help India against the Chinese threat to its northern border and argued that the step taken by Israel was by no means detrimental to Pakistan's security. However, pro-Arab and Muslim groups took the opportunity to condemn the sale and argued that it was a hostile act directed against Pakistan. Nevertheless, even then the contacts between the two countries did not cease.

Although there were no meetings at government level, organizations as well as individuals from both countries continued to meet. By the end of 1964, the President of the Pakistan Trust Employees Union, Haq Vavsi, arrived in Israel as a guest of the Histadrut.²⁸ However, the mounting tension between Israel and the Arab states in the mid-1960s kept the two countries apart. But even at that point Pakistan was more concerned about events in the Indian subcontinent. This becomes evident from statements made by Pakistani officials referring to Israel's collaboration with India. Apart from occasional remarks sympathizing with the Arab states in the struggle against Israel, no specific reference was made regarding Israel's actions in the Middle East. Islamabad was not overwhelmed by the anti-Israeli rhetoric which emanated from Cairo at that time. Pakistani diplomats who met their Israeli counterparts in foreign countries and at the United Nations did not reprimand Israel for aggression against the Arab states but against Pakistan itself. This becomes obvious from the documents in the Israeli State Archives. Thus, for example, in his conversation with an Israeli Foreign Ministry official, the First Secretary in the Pakistani Embassy in Vienna, Abdur Razzak, spoke contemptuously of what he described as 'clandestine' ties between Israel and India. He stated emphatically that his government would never recognize Israel despite the fact that there was a great deal of admiration for Israel among the Pakistanis.²⁹ This comment was made shortly before the outbreak of the Six Day War, when there was considerable tension between Israel and the Arab states and is an indication of what was important on Islamabad's list of priorities.

Although many Pakistanis saw benefit in cooperation with Israel, the overwhelming opinion was that there was no choice but to support the Arabs until the conclusion of a peace treaty between Jews and Arabs.³⁰ In his talks with an Israeli Foreign Ministry official in Colombo, A.M.Nassim Mullah said that Pakistan refrained from assuming a mediating role in the Middle East conflict out of fear that it might offend its friends in the Arab world and Saudi Arabia in particular. Pakistan had considerable influence in moderate countries such as Saudi Arabia, which it did not wish to lose. Its influence was derived from the fact that it acted as a moderating factor neutralizing the radical forces in these countries. Pakistani forces were deployed in Arab countries in the early 1970s and helped suppress radical movements such as the Palestinians in Jordan. This helped not only the moderate regimes in the region but the Israelis as well. It is therefore possible to understand Islamabad's sensitivity to the reaction of those Arab countries which

benefited from Pakistan's help and therefore allowed it to exert influence in the region. At the same time, however, Pakistan still appreciated its ties with Israel. In the same speech in which he spoke about the importance of Pakistan's ties with the Arab states Mullah said that it was clear to him and to every intelligent Pakistani that Israel was 'an established fact, and that the Arabs ought to find a way to coexist with it'.³¹ There were many advocates of normalization with Israel in government circles and in moderate parties in Pakistan. In their conversation with Israeli diplomats, Pakistani officials had stated that a significant number of Social Democratic Party members favored cordial relations with Israel.³²

In order to approach Islamabad the Israelis began using their connections with Iran. This was one of the motives behind the idea of opening a legation in Tehran in 1950.³³ This was the tactic proposed by the Israeli Ambassador to Iran who argued that Pakistan could not fail to see the salutary effect which the Israeli connection had on Iran. He also told his colleagues to intensify their efforts in Islamabad without fear that relations with Pakistan would have an adverse effect on Israel's relations with India.³⁴

Arab support for Pakistan in its confrontation with India in 1965 led to better understanding between Islamabad and the Arab states. While Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan assisted Pakistan in the war effort, Egypt remained neutral. Consequently, the Pakistani government took immediate steps to demonstrate its solidarity with the Arab world. It denounced Israel for its attempts to establish ties with India and came up with statements sympathetic to the Arab cause and to the Palestinians in particular. When the Director of the Middle East Division at the Israeli Foreign Ministry planned to stop at Delhi on his way to New Zealand, the Pakistani daily, *Dawn*, stated, 'It is believed that both Israelis and the Indians have agreed that the present moment is an opportune time to forge an Indo-Israeli front against the Arabs.'³⁵ A similar argument was heard by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who dominated Pakistani politics as Foreign Minister and later as President and finally as Prime Minister.³⁶ Bhutto argued that Israel was using its contacts in Washington on India's behalf.³⁷ It was no mere coincidence that almost every anti-Israeli remark made by a Pakistani government official contained criticism about Israel's collaboration with India in an attempt to harm Pakistan. Only a major event like the Six Day War brought the Pakistani government to speak directly against Israel's aggression in the Middle East. The outbreak of the Six Day War gave Islamabad another opportunity to demonstrate its solidarity with the Arab world. Pakistani representatives at the United Nations denounced what they referred to as Israel's 'naked aggression' during the war.³⁸ When President Ayub Khan arrived in Romania in October 1967 he said that his government believed that only an immediate Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories would bring stability to the Middle East.³⁹

The events that followed the Six Day War brought Pakistan even closer to the Arab states. Pakistan supported all UN resolutions demanding Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and the restoration of Palestinian rights. In 1969, Pakistan participated in the OIC and its representative endorsed the declaration expressing strong support for the rights of the Palestinians and their struggle for national liberation.⁴⁰ As the events in the Indian subcontinent continued to unfold, the hostility between Pakistan and India intensified and had considerable impact on the relations between Israel and Pakistan. The Arab states did not forgo the opportunity to show their support for Pakistan

and thereby keep Israel at a distance. During the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 they supported Pakistan, which ended up losing the war with the creation of Bangladesh. Again, Pakistan reciprocated by supporting the Arab cause in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and condemned Israel in the United Nations for its refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories.⁴¹ Better relations with the Arab states seemed to be the imperative of the moment since Pakistan imported about 90 per cent of its oil from the Gulf countries. In February 1974 Pakistan hosted the second summit meeting of the OIC in Lahore in which 37 countries, including the PLO, participated. Zia ul-Haq's rapprochement with the Arab states was motivated more by economic reasons than by genuine sympathy for their cause. He continued to cultivate relations with the Arab world, particularly with Saudi Arabia, which became an important market for Pakistani goods.⁴² In addition, a growing number of Pakistanis found employment in Arab countries. All these factors contributed to a desire for better understanding with the Arab world. Therefore, it was inevitable that Pakistan's relations with Israel would have to be sacrificed. However, despite his declared pro-Arab policy, Zia ul-Haq was a pragmatist whose main concern was to promote Pakistan's national interests. Ironically, some of his actions served the Israeli cause. In 1970, he was in Jordan helping King Hussein suppress the Palestinian radical Black September faction, and when some Arab states severed their relations with Egypt for concluding a separate treaty with Israel at Camp David, the Pakistani general called upon the OIC to allow Egypt to return to the Arab fold.

If there were any prospects of better relations between Islamabad and Jerusalem these were marred by Pakistan's plan to develop nuclear weapons. The nuclear issue continued to be an obstacle in the normalization process. Israel's destruction of the Iraqi nuclear facility in June 1981 had intensified Pakistan's fear that a similar action against its nuclear facility was imminent. In mid-July 1984, a group of Indian nuclear scientists who were concerned about Pakistan's nuclear plans were invited to Israel to meet with nuclear experts and exchange information. The Israelis seemed more willing to receive information from their Indians guests than to impart information to them.⁴³ Nevertheless, the Pakistanis remained suspicious of both Indian and Israeli aims. What intensified Pakistan's suspicion of Israel's aims was not only the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor but also US pressure to cease all nuclear activities. Officials in Islamabad resented the fact that the United States insisted that Pakistan cease all its nuclear activities without demanding similar compliance from Israel. When the Carter Administration criticized Zia ul-Haq for his nuclear program, the Pakistani leader wondered why Washington demonstrated tolerance toward Israel's nuclear plan. In one of his meetings with US officials he said, 'Why don't you people talk to Israel?'⁴⁴ Their failure to respond exposed both the United States and Israel to criticism in the Pakistani press. One editorial remarked that while the Pressler Amendment affected Pakistan it disregarded India and Israel.⁴⁵ In the following years, there was increasing speculation in Islamabad that the United States was collaborating with Israel in an attempt to destroy the nuclear facility in Kahuta. There were also reports that the United States supplied Israel with satellite pictures of the Pakistani nuclear facility. Pakistani journalists jumped at the opportunity to argue that India was an accomplice in the attempt to destroy the nuclear plant.

The military cooperation between India and Israel, which began in earnest in the late 1980s, did not go unnoticed in Pakistan. Reports of Israeli sophisticated weaponry such

as remote guided vehicles and standoff munitions began to appear both in the Pakistani and the Indian media.⁴⁶ The Pakistani media reported that Israel had offered India an unmanned aircraft designed for intelligence purposes. In addition, the media reported that Israel was in the process of upgrading India's MiG-21 aircraft. Pakistani sources claimed that Israel helped India to improve its arsenal of T-55 Vijayana and Arjun tanks with the most sophisticated technology that it acquired from the United States. Moreover, the Pakistani sources said that Israel helped India develop a nuclear device, which exploded in 1974 in Rajasthan. Radio Islamabad concluded on a somber note saying, 'The fast growing India-Israeli military cooperation does not augur well for New Delhi's smaller neighbors.'⁴⁷

Pakistan's concern regarding Israel's alleged plan to destroy the Kahuta nuclear facility persisted for several more years. In February 1987, a prestigious London weekly published an article in which it claimed that Israel sought India's cooperation in an attempt to destroy the Pakistani nuclear reactor. According to that source, the Indian government turned down the Israeli request three times. The writer argued that Israel obtained from the Indians aerial photographs of the nuclear facility from Jonathan Pollard, the American Jew who was accused of spying on the United States on the Israelis' behalf and later sentenced to long-term imprisonment. The most serious attempt, according to this report, was made in July 1985, when Israeli diplomats met a senior Indian official in Paris to discuss the issue.⁴⁸ Officials in Jerusalem were convinced that India's refusal to collaborate with Israel was a result of Soviet pressure and of Rajiv Gandhi's determination to remain faithful to India's traditional policy of nonalignment.⁴⁹ Fearing an Israeli raid, the Pakistani government was reported to have given Israel assurances that it would not transfer nuclear technology to the Arab states.⁵⁰ Seeking to diffuse the tension, Israeli diplomats reassured their Pakistani counterparts that Israel had no such intentions.⁵¹ Nevertheless the rumors regarding the plan did not die easily and were used effectively by pro-Arab elements that opposed rapprochement with Israel.

Although the Pakistani leaders spoke about their nuclear plan as a project that would benefit the entire Muslim world, they found it prudent to avoid talking about an 'Islamic bomb'. Realizing that talk about the 'Islamic bomb' would force Pakistan to share its nuclear know-how with other Islamic states and thus tarnish its image as a responsible power in the Indian Ocean, the Pakistani government abandoned such rhetoric. While the talk about Israel's cooperation with India in the attempt to destroy Pakistan's nuclear facility was still raging, Islamabad became more open to the idea of improved ties with Israel. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new period in the bilateral relations. The United States emerged as the world's only great power and the transition to democracy in Pakistan led to greater openness. These developments were conducive to better relations between the two countries. Moreover, Pakistan's interest in the Middle East increased considerably with the onset of the peace process from which Islamabad did not wish to be excluded. This was an opportunity to mediate in the Arab-Israeli conflict and thereby improve Pakistan's image in the eyes of the United States and the Arab states, which neither Nawaz Sharif nor Benazir Bhutto was willing to forgo. However, the process of rapprochement was slow due to the Intifada and the slow pace of the peace process, and there were other reasons for the delay which again had more to do with the events which unfolded in the Indian subcontinent.

The allegations concerning Israel's cooperation with India in an attempt to destroy the Pakistani nuclear reactor re-emerged. An attack by a Kashmir guerrilla group on Israeli tourists in the summer of 1991 added considerable weight to the Pakistani allegations.⁵² In June 1991, a Pakistani newspaper claimed that Israeli tourists on a visit to Kashmir actually came in order to sabotage a nearby Pakistani nuclear facility. At the same time, militants from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) attacked a group of eight young Israelis. One Israeli was killed and another kidnapped. The Pakistani daily, *The Muslim*, claimed that the group's members were actually elite Israeli commandos sent with India's knowledge in order to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear reactor.⁵³ Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went to the extent of saying that an Israeli attack on the nuclear facility would leave his country no choice but to react.⁵⁴ The Pakistanis had become so sensitive to their country's needs and its right to develop nuclear weapons that any rumors regarding possible destruction of their nuclear facility or an agreement to deny Pakistan the right to develop such weapons was highly resented.⁵⁵ The reports regarding Israel's collaboration and training of Indian intelligence personnel did not help alleviate the bilateral tension. An editorial in the Pakistani daily, *The Nation*, condemned the collaboration between the Mossad and Indian intelligence.⁵⁶

Pakistani officials had repeatedly stated that they supported the peace process in the Middle East. However, they made it clear that before they considered reassessing their policy toward Israel they would like to see significant progress in the talks with the Palestinians and a total withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan Heights. Particularly sensitive in Islamabad's eyes was the issue of Jerusalem. Pakistani officials said that their country adhered to the Security Council resolutions regarding the holy city of Jerusalem.⁵⁷ The caretaker Prime Minister Moin Qureshi stated that although his government was encouraged by the agreement between Israel and the Palestinians this was only a first step. He stated categorically that his government had no plans to recognize Israel.⁵⁸ This was largely due to the pressure exerted by groups on the fringe of the Pakistani political system. One of the most vociferous of these was the Nawaz faction of the Pakistan Muslim League whose leaders went to the extent of saying that even if the Golan Heights were returned to Syrian sovereignty the problem would remain unsolved because Jerusalem was at the core of the Middle East conflict. It is interesting to note that the group's leader, Mian Nawaz Sharif, was accused of receiving substantial assistance from Israel in order to destabilize the Pakistani government which was then led by Zia ul-Haq and his Islamic Democratic Alliance.⁵⁹ Other groups like the Tehrik-e-Jafferia and the Imamia Student Organization continuously warned the government not to recognize Israel despite the peace process.⁶⁰

The tension over Kashmir was an additional stumbling block on the way to better relations between the two countries. The powerful guerrilla group, Hizbul Mujahidin, that operated in Kashmir was reported to have imposed restrictions on Israeli visitors. Spokesmen for the group argued that the Zionist state was trying to crush their freedom movement. The members of the group were ordered to arrest any Israelis found and hand them over to its leaders. Moreover, they were instructed to examine travel documents of all foreigners in Kashmir. Arguing that India was collaborating with Mossad agents in order to crush the Kashmiri freedom movement, the group decided to ban the entry of Israeli journalists.⁶¹ A leading Pakistani daily reported that on August 1992, four Israeli

spies were caught trying to obtain information about Pakistan's nuclear program and were arrested by the authorities.⁶² However, despite all these obstacles, improvement in the bilateral relations began to loom on the horizon.

By the end of 1992 there were signs, which aroused the curiosity of officials in Jerusalem, as to whether or not Pakistan was warming to Israel. Undoubtedly, India's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in the beginning of that year had a softening effect on Pakistan's attitude toward Israel. Press reports alluded to two incidents that could have been interpreted as signs of a change of heart in Islamabad. In August 1992, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Begun Abida Hussain, stated in a private conversation that her government should follow India and recognize Israel. She added that India's support for the Palestinians did not prevent it from recognizing Israel. The Pakistani Ambassador repeated the same argument in an interview to an Indian national newspaper. Her statement triggered a sharp reaction from Pakistani religious leaders and fundamentalist parties, who demanded that she be dismissed from her position. However, the Pakistani Ambassador managed to survive by stating that the media had distorted her statement and that all she meant to say was that such recognition was contingent upon a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another sign of a possible change of heart in Islamabad occurred late in November that year when Pakistani businessmen visited Israel without authorization from Islamabad. The Israeli government received the guests cordially. Again, when the media reported the event a flood of critical remarks erupted in Pakistan. Religious leaders condemned the contacts and criticized the Pakistani Foreign Ministry for allowing the visit to take place. However, since the names of the visitors were not revealed the event was soon forgot-ten. Both incidents were followed by a visit of the Arab League Secretary, Esmet Abd al-Meguid who was reported to have advised the Pakistani leaders to follow in the steps of most Arab states and recognize Israel. Despite these signs, however, Islamabad remained reluctant to follow Abd al-Meguid's advice. A spokesman for the Pakistani Foreign Ministry told Lindsey Shanson of the *Jerusalem Report*, 'Our ties with Iran are very cordial and it has much influence. And the illiterate are easily swayed by the fundamentalists. To the educated classes, which comprise less than 10 per cent of the country, recognizing Israel makes no difference. The fundamentalists won't allow it to happen.'⁶³ Nevertheless, it seemed as if progress in the peace process convinced the Pakistani government that recognizing Israel would not be such a great risk after all.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's intention to warm to Israel can be understood when one considers her overall objective: to gain greater respectability and legitimacy for her country. This became particularly crucial following the scandalous news regarding corruption in her government. In one of her speeches she boasted that 'In just two months we have been able to bring an end to the international isolation and regain the confidence of the people in the state machinery.'⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, better relations with the United States were regarded as instrumental in helping Islamabad improve its international standing and its position vis-à-vis India. As officials in Islamabad saw it, better relations with Israel would lead to greater US sympathy toward Pakistan and tolerance toward its ambitions to become a great power in the region.

Despite consistent denials by Islamabad, its desire to mend fences with the United States prompted it to warm to Israel. An Israeli Foreign Ministry official has told the

author that 'The Pakistani government's perception is that Israel can pull strings in Washington.'⁶⁵ Yet even Pakistan's desire to mend fences with Washington was not sufficient to cause a significant change in attitude toward Israel. Many Pakistanis argued that there was not much to be gained from better relations with Israel and that the United States would still disapprove of Pakistan's nuclear plans. One of the editorials written about this issue shed light on the thinking of those who objected to recognizing Israel. It read in part:

The assumptions of the recognition lobby remain unexamined. What Pakistani interest shall be served by it? Are the US alarmed over Pakistan's nuclear programme, or its objections to our alleged terror activities, based on our non-recognition of Israel? Will the Israelis regard recognition by us as a strategic breakthrough, and promptly become our ally and lobbyists in Washington? Is Israel a likely strategic or economic partner of Pakistan? Is there an objective basis for such partnership? Will the failure to recognize Israel lead to Pakistan's isolation and cause it to be 'crushed' by the US, India or Israel? These questions are rarely addressed. It is obvious that advocates of Pakistan's recognition of Israel—by which I understand the establishment of diplomatic relations—have not reasoned out their position.⁶⁶

Israel's concern regarding Pakistan's nuclear plans remained a major stumbling block on the way to better relations. When Washington debated whether Pakistan should be placed on the list of countries considered terrorist due to its refusal to sign the NPT, Peres stated that Israel would back the US decision.⁶⁷ Such utterances made it more difficult for the Pakistani government to promote better relations with Israel. The painfully slow pace of the Middle East peace process compounded the difficulty. In a speech broadcast by Pakistani television on 26 July 1993, Acting President Wasim Sajjad stated that 'We will support, as ever, our Palestinian brethren in their historic struggle for justice and sovereignty... Pakistan enjoys extremely cordial relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and other Islamic countries and will always strive to give more dimension and depth to these relations.'⁶⁸

By the end of 1993, additional press reports revealed the magnitude of the Israeli-Indian cooperation. According to one report, the Mossad trained and installed about 100 Indian officials in Kashmir where they became involved in intelligence operations. The same source claimed that since 1990 about 300 Mossad agents were involved in training Indian personnel in order to plan a heli-borne assault on the Kahuta nuclear facility and that Israel was involved in advising Indians on how to evict the Muslims from the Kashmir valley in order to bring about a demographic change in that region. In addition, the report provided details regarding Israeli supplies of arms to India since 1962.⁶⁹ However, along with this discouraging news there were reports at the beginning of 1994 that negotiations aimed at establishing diplomatic ties between the two countries had taken place in Washington. According to these reports, India's normalization of relations with Israel was the main motive behind this move.⁷⁰

In January 1994, the Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry Uri Savir informed Peres that the main target of his ministry for the coming year was to reach the Muslim

countries in Asia and Africa and to establish full diplomatic relations with Pakistan. The reason for this, according to political analysts, was that Israel wanted to establish good relations with the large Muslim countries prior to the beginning of the negotiations regarding the future of Jerusalem.⁷¹ However, officials in Islamabad insisted that it was premature to recognize Israel.

On 30 January 1994, N.D.Khan, the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, said in the National Assembly that recognizing Israel was absolutely out of the question. He added that his government was reviewing the developments in the region and would determine its stand after examining the reaction of the Arab countries.⁷² This time the delay in the normalization process occurred as a result of the events in the Middle East. The Hebron massacre of that year was an unexpected setback in the normalization process. It had further exacerbated the tension in the Middle East, forcing Ms Bhutto to take a tougher stand against Israel. Ms Bhutto expressed deep sorrow over the event and took the opportunity to urge the Security Council to implement UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as well as other resolutions regarding Jerusalem in order to bring peace to the war-torn Middle East.⁷³ Reacting to an announcement made by the Israeli media that Bhutto met President Ezer Weizman in South Africa in the spring of 1994, Foreign Ministry officials in Islamabad said that no such meeting had ever taken place and that this was part of the Israeli media misinformation campaign aimed at maligning Pakistan by spreading lies.⁷⁴ However, Ms Bhutto's decision was motivated by pragmatic reasons and not by anti-Israeli feelings. She was far from being the rabid anti-Zionist that is often portrayed in the Pakistani media. Her main consideration was the Muslim response throughout the world and in Pakistan in particular.

In addition to pressure groups within the country, Islamabad was under pressure from extremists within the Palestinian camp not to recognize Israel. This was particularly the case with Hamas, whose spokesmen constantly spoke against relations with Israel. Hamas leader Khalil Mishal appealed to Pakistan's sensitivity regarding its national security and its international standing. He once argued that Islamabad should not normalize relations with a country that was determined to destroy Pakistan as a military power.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the contacts between the two countries did not cease. On the contrary, there were increasing signs that Pakistan was interested in improving the ties. In August 1994 Israel's Ambassador to Cairo David Sultan held several meetings with Pakistan's Ambassador to Egypt Mansur Alem. Sultan reported to the Israeli Foreign Ministry that Pakistan was sending positive signals in Israel's direction. However, when Israel prevented the entry of the Pakistani Ambassador Tika Khan to Gaza, a brief period of tension between the two countries ensued.⁷⁶ The reason given by Israel was that the Ambassador's visit was not coordinated with Israel. In addition, Ms Bhutto announced publicly that she intended to visit Gaza. Beilin stated that Israel would not prevent Ms Bhutto from visiting Gaza but insisted on a formal request.⁷⁷ Fearing that such a request would be interpreted as recognition of Israel and not only of Israeli sovereignty in the Gaza Strip, Ms Bhutto sought to avoid domestic opposition and therefore canceled her visit.⁷⁸ Furious at Ms Bhutto's action Rabin said:

The lady from Pakistan should be taught a lesson in manners. One does not announce publicly, 'I will come to Gaza, but I am unwilling to visit Israel.'

There is a need for some politeness in the international system... We have no problem if the lady or her representatives come to Gaza, but they have to apply in the proper fashion, according to procedures and then they will be permitted to enter Gaza.⁷⁹

Israel's decision to prevent the Pakistani Ambassador from entering Gaza was criticized not only in the Muslim world, but in Israel as well. Foreign Ministry officials criticized Rabin, saying that the incident caused unnecessary embarrassment for Arafat and alienated Islamabad. Yet they supported Rabin's decision, saying that while Israel always promoted better understanding with Pakistan, Ms Bhutto continued to refuse to normalize relations with Israel and decided to send the Ambassador without coordination with Israel.⁸⁰ Left-of-center ministers like Moshe Shahal and Shulamit Aloni lashed out at Rabin for missing an opportunity to improve relations with Pakistan and for alienating the Palestinians. Pakistan's reaction to the Israeli refusal was that 'We do not need to learn manners from Israel.' The Pakistani Foreign Ministry referred to Rabin's comments as 'unwarranted and impolite' and stated that Ms Bhutto's visit was canceled.

These incidents triggered criticism against Ms Bhutto as well. The main opposition came from the Islamic League whose spokesman said, 'She should not have considered visiting Gaza. This is still a part of Israel and we cannot allow Bhutto or any other Pakistani leader to recognize Israel or maintain any contacts with the Israelis.'⁸¹ The Israeli government decided to apologize for the incident but authorized its envoys to criticize the initial comment made by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry that Ms Bhutto intended to visit Gaza but would ignore Israel and not establish any contacts with it.⁸²

Officials in Islamabad remained convinced that Israel's attempt to reach India and the successful collaboration between the two was meant to counter the Pakistani threat.⁸³ When asked by Israeli officials whether the time had not come for Pakistan to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, the Pakistani Ambassador in Egypt answered that the conditions for such recognition were not yet ripe. There were, however, reports that representatives of the two countries met in the United Nations to discuss such a possibility. Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Gad Ya'acoby was reported to have met Pakistan's Ambassador for what were described as 'corridor talks'. Pakistani officials were reported to have expressed their desire to conduct such talks in the United Nations rather than directly between the two countries. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials were less than encouraged by Ms Bhutto's planned visit, saying that it was unlikely to improve the bilateral relations. They argued that Ms Bhutto's attitude toward Israel stemmed mainly from domestic problems such as an unstable coalition, family intrigues and Islamic fundamentalism, which had a strong grip on the country.

In the summer of 1994, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were convinced that diplomatic relations between the two countries were not imminent due to strong opposition, not only from the Arab states but also from fundamentalists and clerics in Pakistan.⁸⁴ The reports about the kidnapping of Israelis in Kashmir constituted another stumbling block on the way to normalization.⁸⁵ Nevertheless the Pakistanis showed more signs of willingness to rethink their policy. On 26 October 1994 the Pakistani government sent its representative to participate in the ceremony marking the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty on the border between the two countries. Shortly afterwards, Ms Bhutto

participated in the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit in Casablanca and Pakistan's Ambassador Ahmad Kamal attended a reception given by his Israeli counterpart Gad Ya'acobi. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials took these opportunities to get a sense of Pakistan's view about establishing diplomatic relations. In an interview to London MBC Television on 15 January 1995, Ms Bhutto was questioned regarding the issue of recognizing Israel. Her response was:

We have not made a decision in this regard. But we welcomed the developments of the peace process in the Middle East. We are eager for a comprehensive peace for the Middle East conflict to be achieved, including the Golan Heights and the status of Jerusalem. We believe that much has been achieved in this area. We hope that more will be achieved soon, God willing.⁸⁶

Sensing that Ms Bhutto might be inclined to come to terms with Israel, the Muslims in Pakistan expressed their opposition. Pressure on the government to refrain from recognizing Israel came from Muslim organizations outside Pakistan as well. At the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) meeting in Ifrane the Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali called upon Israel to withdraw from al-Quds al-Sharif and to restore its Islamic character in order to bring a lasting peace to the Middle East. He added that no arrangement allowing Israel to continue occupying the holy city would be acceptable to the Islamic community and that Israel's actions in the Arab-occupied territories and the forcible eviction of Palestinians from their land must come to an end.⁸⁷ Yet the positive signs from Islamabad continued. Numerous press reports appeared stating that there were contacts between representatives of both countries and that the United States was instrumental in encouraging the two sides to improve their relations.⁸⁸ In an attempt to contribute to the normalization process, Israel informed Pakistani officials that it would use its influence in Washington to help their country acquire military aid.

Meanwhile, advocates of better relations with Israel continued to argue that the time to recognize Israel had come, particularly since the peace process was in progress. Moreover, they argued that Pakistan could benefit from Israel's connections in Washington. Some even went to the extent of arguing that relations with the Arab states did not earn Pakistan handsome dividends and that normalization with Jerusalem could bring Israeli technical know-how to Pakistan. While Islamabad was waiting for the 'appropriate time' to recognize Israel, stronger business ties were being established between the two countries. In August 1995, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was reported to have successfully negotiated and purchased a consignment of aircraft parts from Israel Aircraft Industries. According to these reports, the Pakistani government authorized the deal. The same sources said that the deal 'is the first step towards establishing normal diplomatic ties with Israel'.⁸⁹ It would seem, however, that the Pakistanis were not ready for such a change. The news about the commercial deal triggered critical remarks in the Pakistani press. The author of one editorial wrote:

Israel is the only country in the world with whom Pakistan does not have any sort of ties. Israeli authorities were active in the past in hatching enormous and loathsome conspiracies against Pakistan. Joining hands with Indian authorities,

they also fabricated a scheme to destroy the Kahuta nuclear research center; the Israeli lobby did not miss any opportunity to harm Pakistan. It is right that, after some understanding reached between Israel and PLO, certain Islamic countries have come forward to stabilize their ties with Israel. Pakistan, however, should think 101 times regarding whether or not Israel has abandoned its tendency to hatch vicious conspiracies against Pakistan before strengthening any kind of relations with that country. Has Israel desisted from its shameful efforts to harm Pakistan's interests by joining hands with India and other anti-Pakistani elements?⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the Pakistani government did not see much risk in expanding its commercial contacts with Israel and in October 1995 it expressed a desire to participate in the International Congress for Small Businesses scheduled to take place in Israel.⁹¹

By the mid-1990s, it seemed as if the Pakistani government had embarked on an irreversible process and that recognition of Israel was just a matter of time. Rabin's assassination gave Islamabad another opportunity to show good will toward Israel, and a Pakistani representative was present at his funeral. Moreover, there were reports that Pakistani intelligence and law enforcement agents met Israelis and discussed methods of dealing with terrorism.⁹² Nevertheless, Pakistan's nuclear plan complicated matters and did not allow the bilateral relations to continue smoothly. There were more reports about Israeli-Indian cooperation. Once again, Israel had to deny the Pakistani claim that it was planning to hit the Pakistani nuclear reactor.⁹³ According to press reports the Israel satellite Ofek provided India with data on Pakistan. In return, India gave Israel the ability to use India's territory for its monitoring missions. According to the same reports, the Mossad's main target was to learn as much as possible about Pakistan's nuclear program.⁹⁴ Unwilling to interrupt the normalization process, the Israelis went to great lengths to allay Pakistani suspicions. In an interview in Ankara Uri Bar Ner, the Israeli Ambassador in Turkey, said that Pakistan had assured Israel that it would not pass on nuclear technology to Iran.⁹⁵ This assurance helped improve the atmosphere. However, so strong was the theory regarding Israel's conspiracy with India against Pakistan that it remained quite difficult for the government to prepare public opinion for such a drastic change in the country's foreign policy.⁹⁶

The change in Islamabad's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict becomes clear from the statements made by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry. Reacting to attacks by the Hamas a Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman said that his government condemned 'all forms of terrorism' and urged 'all parties in the Middle East to preserve their commitment to the peace process'. However, the press was divided over the issue. While *Dawn* regarded Israel as 'the major enemy of the peace process', the *Frontier Post* said, 'it is vital for the international community to evolve an effective mechanism to deal with growing terrorism'.⁹⁷ This change in the Pakistani attitude toward terrorism was partially inspired by Islamabad's desire for closer ties with Egypt. In March 1997 Prime Minister Sharif said that his country was eager to establish closer ties with Egypt. He expressed his regrets over the terrorist attack which devastated the Egyptian Embassy in 1995, and said that his was a country willing 'to cooperate with the world to uproot terrorism from its territory'. Moreover, he said that Islamabad was eager to abide by a security accord

signed with Egypt to fight terrorism.⁹⁸ Undoubtedly, Pakistan's desire to mend fences with Egypt had a salutary effect on its attitude toward Israel. This becomes clear from its response to Rabin's assassination: a spokesman for the Pakistani Foreign Ministry attributed the act to a Jewish extremist and added, 'Pakistan deplors all acts of terrorism without exception'.⁹⁹ This was despite the fact that many editorials argued that Rabin's image as a man of peace was distorted.¹⁰⁰

Cordial relations with Islamabad had recently become one of the most important objects of Israeli foreign policy. That the difficulties remained insurmountable was largely due to Pakistan's Islamic character. Moreover, Pakistan's dispute with India was a major stumbling block. Unlike Nepal, whose leaders waited for a green light from New Delhi before establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, the Pakistanis harbored resentment against Israel's attempts at rapprochement with India. Israel's military cooperation with India had further intensified the tension in the bilateral relations. Nevertheless, Islamabad had good reasons to approach Israel. First and foremost was the fact that the cordial relations with the Arabs did not earn it handsome dividends. Arab support for Pakistan in its struggle against India was by no means unqualified. Furthermore, Pakistan's Western orientation and its desire to mend fences with Washington had a salutary effect on the bilateral relations. Yet the road to normalization remained strewn with obstacles. This is largely due to the failure of the Middle East peace process. The fact that Islamabad placed heavy emphasis on Israel's need to allow the creation of a Palestinian state and to withdraw from Jerusalem compounded the issue even further. Given the failure of the Middle East peace negotiations, it is unlikely that even the most moderate regime in Islamabad would be willing to upgrade the bilateral relations in the face of such enormous opposition. Speculating on the future of the bilateral relations and the reasons why they have not improved as the Israelis had hoped Naeem Rathore, the Adviser to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the author:

Israeli-Pakistan relations have not been allowed to develop because of the policies and apprehensions of both governments. There exists a relationship in the non-recognition relations and for the future much depends on how each country perceives its national interest, local, regional and global. Pakistan is not likely to undermine its relations with the Islamic world, anymore than Israel would ignore its links with Jewish populations outside Israel.

He argued, however, that rapprochement with Pakistan was not a remote possibility and that it depended on confidence-building measures which Israel would have to take in order to promote good will in Islamabad. He said:

Israel may have to differentiate Arab vs. non-Arab countries. Can Israel show support for resolution of the Kashmir dispute? This could be a beginning. As a first step, Israel can support the India-Pakistan declaration signed in Lahore between the Prime Ministers recently. With the development of Israeli relations between some of the Arab countries, like Egypt, Jordan and now Morocco, it is not inconceivable that if Israel were to show a less apprehensive and, at times, less hostile public attitude towards non-Arab Islamic countries and not lump

them with those Arab countries with which she is presently in conflict, it could create conditions for better relations with countries like Pakistan and some other Muslim countries besides Turkey. Conversely, if Israel-PLO relations were to move further, which they are bound to, that would give both Israel and countries like Pakistan further wiggle room for approaching Israel with pragmatic areas of cooperation.¹⁰¹

What will the future of Israeli-Pakistani relations be? One can only speculate that pressure from both opponents and proponents will continue. The undeniable fact is that the Pakistani hostility characteristic of yesteryear had lost its potency and that the advocates of normalization have increased in number. Undoubtedly, the outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa was a major obstacle to normalization. There will undoubtedly be further obstacles on the road to peace in the Middle East but if peace negotiations get back on track there is hope that the bilateral relations will gain momentum. Pakistani businessmen are likely to continue to favor normalization with Israel and pragmatic politicians are likely to continue arguing that relations with Israel are the key to rapprochement with the United States. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Muslim groups and organizations in Pakistan are going to approve of the normalization process even if the peace process leads to the creation of a Palestinian state and a satisfactory settlement over Jerusalem is reached. Even if the peace process resumes, Islamabad is not likely to give much publicity to its contacts with Israel. It would continue the normalization process but would not establish more than a low-level diplomatic representation in Tel Aviv.

NOTES

1. For an analysis of the gravity of Pakistan's security problems see Agha Sahi, 'Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A New Dimension', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Spring 1988), pp. 28–36.
2. Nehru remarked at one time that he resented Israel because it was based on religion and thus reminded him of Pakistan. Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 297. Similarly, General Zia ul-Haq once remarked: 'Pakistan is like Israel, an ideological State. Take out the Judaism from Israel and it will fall like a house of cards. Take Islam out of Pakistan and make it a secular state; it would collapse.' *The Economist*, 12 December 1981.
3. *The Muslim*, 4 September 1992.
4. P.R.Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil: Israel-Pakistan Relations*, Memorandum No. 55 (Tel-Aviv University: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, March 2000), p. 20.
5. Duff to Brenchley, PRO FO/371, 185176, B10320/1, 8 November 1946.
6. Thus, for example, he supported M.A.Ahmed, a Pakistani businessman who came to Israel during the 1950s. Ahmed to Rothschild, ISA 3432/37, 25 February 1963.
7. Weizmann to Joseph, 13 September 1945, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann* Series A (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1979), Vol. 22, p. 47.
8. S.M.Burke and Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 137.

9. Eban, *An Autobiography*, p. 91.
10. Michael B. Bishku, 'In Search of Identity and Security: Pakistan and the Middle East, 1947–77', *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1992), p. 36.
11. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 30.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
13. Brecher, *India and World Politics*, pp. 52, 79.
14. It is interesting to note that at the Bogor Conference where the nonaligned members convened in order to determine what countries would participate in the Bandung Conference, the Pakistanis objected to China's participation but finally withdrew their objection when the members agreed to bar Israel from the conference. David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement: Ideology and Foreign Policy of the Third World* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973), p. 52.
15. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 31.
16. 'A Conversation with Pakistani Representatives in the UN', ISA 2559/11, 7 April 1952.
17. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 31–2.
18. 'Joshua Trigor: Ties with Employees of the Pakistani Mission in Sydney', ISA 2559/11, 25 November 1954.
19. 'Zafrulla's Speech to Journalists in Karachi', ISA 2559/10, 9 April 1954.
20. Cited in Bishku, 'In Search of Identity', *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 35.
21. Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York: Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1981), p. 152.
22. Aynor and Avimor (eds), *Thirty Years of Israel's International Technical Assistance*, p. 323.
23. Comay to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3110/19, 31 December 1956.
24. *Dawn*, 4 November 1956.
25. Bishku, 'In Search of Identity', *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 41.
26. Moonis Ahmar, 'Pakistan and Israel—Distant Adversaries or Neighbors?', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Fall 1996), p. 37.
27. *Dawn*, 25 July 1963.
28. Aynor, Avimor and Kaminer (eds), *The Role of the Israel Labor Movement*, p. 92.
29. Shomron to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4056/29, 11 May 1966.
30. Ramati to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4059/13, 14 January 1966.
31. Ramati to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4056/26, 3 June 1966.
32. Tagar to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4056/29, 7 December 1966.
33. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 42.
34. Dorial to Eban, ISA 4056/29, 19 February 1967.
35. *Dawn*, 10 April 1965.
36. Bhutto was far from being a rabid anti-Israeli. His criticism was mainly a by-product of pragmatic considerations and not an aversion to Israel per se. This becomes evident from conversations which he held with Israeli officials. Thus, for example, in a meeting with Shabtai Rosen of the Israeli delegation to the United Nations in 1958, Bhutto said that he disliked the Arabs and despised the way they were conducting their political affairs. Moreover, he said that although the UN decision to partition Palestine in 1947 was wrong it was in Pakistan's interest to

recognize Israel. Moreover, he said that he had a great deal of admiration for Israel.

37. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 33.
37. Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 97.
38. Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, p. 371.
39. Carmi to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4056/29, 24 October 1967.
40. Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, pp. 372–4.
41. Bishku, 'In Search of Identity', *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 44.
42. For details and figures regarding Pakistan's trade with the Middle East see Bishku, pp. 45–6.
43. Ostrovsky and Hoy, *By Way of Deception*, p. 127.
44. Seymour M. Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear and Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 263.
45. *The Nation*, 20 November 1991.
46. *Hindu Weekly*, 1 May 1993.
47. According to these sources, the value of military hardware which Israel had sent to India since 1979 was estimated to have reached US\$100 million. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in English, FBIS-NES-93-247, 28 December 1992.
48. *Statesman Weekly*, 19 September 1987; *Ma'ariv*, 22 February 1987.
49. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 February 1987.
50. *Guardian Weekly*, 22 April 1990.
51. By the mid-1980s one of Sharon's aids, Avraham Tamir visited Pakistan and reassured Zia ul-Haq that Israel had no such intentions. He even concluded arms deals with the Pakistani leader. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 46.
52. *The Nation*, 21 January 1994.
53. Hong Kong AFP in English, FBIS-NES-91-126, 1 July 1991.
54. *Dawn*, 29 July 1991.
55. One editorial said: 'Of course no government in Pakistan can openly sign away its nuclear options and survive for more than 24 hours, but there is a real danger that the present government may enter into a secret pact with Washington overlords and barter away our sovereignty for a fistful of silver.' *Pakistan Observer*, 10 May 1993.
56. *The Nation*, 2 August 1992.
57. *Ibid.*, 10 September 1993.
58. Islamabad PTV Television in English, FBIS-NES-93-177, 15 September 1993.
59. The assistance was provided in the form of steel scraps given by Israeli agents free or at a nominal charge. The Israeli ship *Jamatu* delivered 27,500 tons of scrap worth 240 million rupees. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in Urdu. FBIS-NES-94-022, 2 February 1994.
60. Ahmar, 'Pakistan and Israel', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 43.
61. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in Urdu, FBIS-NES-92-151, 5 August 1992.
62. *The Nation*, 18 August 1992.
63. *Jerusalem Report*, 31 December 1992.
64. Islamabad PTV Television in English, FBIS-NES-93-247, 28 December 1992.
65. Author's interview with Choshen.

66. *Dawn*, 16 September 1993.
67. *Times of India*, 9 May 1993.
68. Islamabad PTV in Urdu, FBIS-NES-93-142, 27 July 1993.
69. *Pakistan Observer*, 15 December 1993.
70. *Hatzofe*, 22 December 1993.
71. *Ha'aretz*, 17 January 1994.
72. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in Urdu, FBIS-NES-94-022, 2 February 1994.
73. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in Urdu, FBIS-NES-94-040, 1 March 1994.
74. *The Muslim*, 12 May 1994.
75. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1994.
76. Jerusalem Israel Television Channel I in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-94-167, 29 August 1994.
77. *The Muslim*, 30 August 1994.
78. *Dawn*, 1 September 1994.
79. *Ha'aretz*, 30 August 1994.
80. Jerusalem Qol Yisrael in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-94-168, 30 August 1994.
81. *Ha'aretz*, 31 August 1994.
82. *Ibid.*, 4 September 1994.
83. *The Nation*, 26 November 1994.
84. Author's interview with Choshen.
85. *Jerusalem Post*, 22 July 1995.
86. London MBC Television, FBIS-NES-95-011, 18 January 1995.
87. Islamabad Radio Pakistan in English. FBIS-NES-95-011, 18 January 1995.
88. These reports emanated from the Agence France Presse (AFP), the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Pakistan Press International (APP), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and other sources. See details in Ahmar, 'Pakistan and Israel', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 34–6.
89. *The News*, 14 September 1995.
90. Islamabad KHABRAIN in Urdu, FBIS-NES-95-179, 15 September 1995.
91. *Ha'aretz*, 30 October 1995.
92. Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 38–9.
93. *Jerusalem Post*, 2 June 1998.
94. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1998.
95. *Ibid.*, 16 June 1998.
96. For details regarding the conspiracy theory see Kumaraswamy, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 58–63.
97. *Arab News*, 11 March 1996.
98. *Egyptian Gazette*, 27 March 1997; 1 April 1997.
99. Islamabad Radio in Urdu, FBIS-NES-95-215-S, 7 November 1995.
100. *The Muslim*, 6 November 1995.
101. Author's interview with Dr Naeem Rathore, Adviser to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, 9 May 1999.

Indonesia—Diplomacy in the Dark

Israel's relations with Indonesia were determined by several factors, the most important of which was the Muslim character of that country. In addition, Indonesia's commitment to nonalignment kept the two countries apart. Throughout the entire period the Indonesian government remained steadfast in its decision not to recognize Israel. It was only after the Middle East peace process began that Jakarta became receptive to the idea of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Yet despite reports that diplomatic relations with Israel were imminent, which circulated throughout the media in the early 1990s, the Indonesian government did not move toward full normalization. This was primarily due to the slow pace of the peace process. Nevertheless, there were numerous contacts between the two countries throughout the entire period of the Jewish state's existence. These were conducted in irregular and informal ways and rarely at governmental level. This chapter explores the course of the bilateral relations, and its main goal is to explain the reasons for Jakarta's reluctance to respond favorably to Israel's overtures.

Israel's motives in approaching Indonesia were varied and complex. In a memorandum dated 13 March 1950, the Director of the Asian Division in the Foreign Ministry explained that Israel sought diplomatic relations with Indonesia for the following reasons:

- (a) the hope that normalization with Indonesia would convince Nehru to recognize Israel;
- (b) the conviction that diplomatic relations would help Israel gain acceptance in the Muslim world;
- (c) the conviction that the center of gravity of world politics was moving to South-East Asia and that the region was about to assume greater importance in the future;
- (d) the realization that Indonesia with its 75 million Muslim inhabitants was the sixth largest country in the world and that its political importance was likely to increase; and
- (e) the realization that Indonesia was one of the world's richest countries with commodities such as coffee, tea, sugar, rubber, oils, lumber and rare minerals.

He therefore recommended that Israel take the first opportunity to open an Embassy in Jakarta.¹

Although the establishment of diplomatic relations with Indonesia was not a high priority on the Israeli Foreign Ministry's agenda its officials had demonstrated an interest in that country from the outset. Indonesia's geographical location and the fact that it was the world's most populous Muslim country were factors which Israel could hardly afford to ignore. However, Indonesia's affiliation with the countries of Third World which were accustomed to view Zionism with hostility and suspicion discouraged any contacts. Unlike other small Asian countries, which could benefit from Israeli technical aid, Indonesia's size discouraged the Israelis from attempting to embark on any development

projects. Moreover, the country's Muslim population was extremely sensitive to Arab concerns. The fact that the Arab governments supported Indonesia's independence from the Netherlands was viewed with favor in Jakarta and helped put Arab-Indonesian relations on firm foundations.² Consequently, there was little desire in Indonesia to approach a state which most Indonesians regarded as aggressive and expansionist. It was obvious to most observers in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that establishing ties with Indonesia would have to await better circumstances. Therefore, the issue no longer occupied a central place on the ministry's agenda. The Foreign Ministry's approach was to bide its time and try to gradually establish friendly ties with Indonesia without much investment or intense courtship.³

The initial method that Israel pursued was to use Holland as a mediator. In a letter dated 4 December 1949, M. Rosner, a Foreign Ministry official, who was involved in the early contacts, suggested that Eytan use his connections with influential Dutch and Indonesian friends who had access to Indonesian government officials in order to create an atmosphere conducive to cordial relations.⁴ The Israeli Foreign Ministry accepted the recommendation and instructed Rosner to proceed with caution.⁵ The immediate outcome of this approach was Israel's decision to recognize Indonesia immediately after its independence on 9 January 1950.⁶ Thereupon, Eban sent a note congratulating the new republic. In a telegram to President Weizmann, President Ahmed Sukarno wrote:

Profoundest gratitude I convey for your congratulatory message and kind words. I am deeply convinced that reborn Indonesia shall make utmost efforts to render herself worthy of the friendship and confidence of all her friends by contributing to world peace, democracy and prosperity.⁷

From Israel's viewpoint, such a general and non-binding message from Sukarno was quite discouraging, particularly when it was followed by additional signs that Jakarta had no intention of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Jakarta's attitude became abundantly clear in the autumn of 1951, when it rejected Israel's request to send a good will mission to Indonesia. The cable received from Jakarta stated,

According to the political situation at the present we are very regretted [*sic*] to inform your Excellency that the government of Indonesia is not in a position to fulfill your Excellency's desires. When circumstances permit it we shall be glad to receive the mentioned mission.⁸

When Israeli Foreign Ministry officials requested further explanation the response from Jakarta was that Indonesia was not pursuing an anti-Israeli foreign policy but that conditions in the country at that time were so unstable that encouraging the visit of governmental missions was inappropriate.⁹ Officials in Jerusalem continued to regard Jakarta's responses to their overtures as non-committal and evasive. Even Israel's attempts to establish commercial relations with Indonesia in the early 1950s were not as successful as Foreign Ministry officials had hoped. When the Indonesian ship *SS Diponegoro*, which carried sugar from Cuba, arrived in Israel the Indonesian government did not allow it to unload its cargo. When confronted by Israeli officials, the Indonesian representatives explained that this was the first time that such an incident had occurred

and that it captured the attention of the country's Muslim population and therefore the government was compelled to avoid unrest by ordering the captain not to unload the ship's cargo. Moreover, they argued that the government feared that the matter would turn into a public debate that could lead to its downfall. They said that while they appreciated Israel's friendship they were concerned about the fact that 95 per cent of Indonesia's population consisted of Muslims who were unprepared for relations with Israel and asked that their predicament be understood.¹⁰ In 1952 Israeli officials approached their Indonesian counterparts again and were told explicitly that the Indonesian government was determined not to recognize Israel.¹¹ When confronted by the Israelis they explained that the Indonesian government was in no position to move toward normalization with Israel because most Indonesians were Muslims; the Arab states helped Indonesia obtain its independence; Indonesia needed Arab support in the United Nations; there were almost no Jews in Indonesia and there were no significant commercial ties with Israel.¹² At a luncheon given to representatives of Asian countries the Indonesian representative explained why establishing diplomatic relations with Israel was so problematic. He said that his country had to maintain cordial relations with the Arab states so that these would help it in its struggle for independence. However, he said to an Israeli Foreign Ministry official that he would communicate Israel's request for normalization to his government.¹³ Yet despite the absence of diplomatic relations there was some cooperation between the two countries and in the summer of 1952 the head of Indonesia's delegation to the United Nations approached the Israelis asking them to support his country's candidature to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSSOC).¹⁴ In addition, the Histadrut maintained contacts with Indonesia's trade unions and socialist organizations and there were sporadic mutual visits throughout the 1950s.¹⁵

In February 1953, reports began circulating regarding attempts made by the Indonesian socialists to change the course of the bilateral relations. Appreciative of what they regarded as an Israeli success in establishing democratic socialism they tried in vain to pressure their government to change its attitude toward Israel.¹⁶ By the summer of 1953, a sense of disappointment prevailed in Jerusalem. Eytan wrote to the Foreign Ministry that in his opinion there was no point in corresponding with Indonesia, or sending congratulatory notes to its leaders because they never reciprocated.¹⁷ Indonesia's attitude in the spring of 1954 was regarded as petulant and discouraging when it refused to grant visas to Israeli representatives scheduled to participate in the Bandung Conference.¹⁸

Indonesia's refusal to normalize relations with Israel stemmed not only from a fear that any pro-Israeli move was liable to alienate the Muslim majority but also from the fact that the government had a precarious majority in the parliament. It depended on the support of the extreme right-wing parties whose members were hostile to Israel. Concerned that the socialists would gain greater popularity and lead to its downfall, the government refrained from responding favorably to Israel's friendly overtures. This was the main reason why the government sought to prevent the holding of the socialist conference in Indonesia and refused to grant visas to the Israeli participants.¹⁹ The rising tension along Israel's borders with the Arab states during the mid-1950s discouraged the Indonesian government from warming to Israel. Furthermore, the Free Officers coup in Egypt and the subsequent rise of Pan-Arabism under Nasser's leadership stirred up all

Muslim countries against Israel and its association with colonialism. Pro-Nasser demonstrations were common in Indonesia during that period and the formation of the Militant Movement for Palestine headed by Kaji Dachlan was interpreted in Jerusalem as a sign that Indonesia was getting closer to the Arabs.²⁰ When asked why Indonesia refused to grant a visa to an Israeli delegate to the Asian socialist conference scheduled to be held in the summer of 1954, Indonesia's Foreign Minister said that the refusal came as a result of Israel's hostility to the Arab states which were friendly with Indonesia.²¹ When approached by Israeli Foreign Ministry officials regarding the issue of diplomatic relations, an Indonesian official in Rangoon stated that his government did not think that the time was appropriate for such a step. Pressed to explain the reason behind his government's refusal he admitted that his country was disappointed about Israel's vote for Holland on the question of West Irian.²² He explained that by voting with countries like Taiwan, Turkey and the Union of South Africa against Indonesia the Israelis proved that they were on the side of colonialism.²³ Moreover, he argued that by doing so Israel not only hurt Indonesia but also betrayed the principle of anti-colonialism.²⁴ Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were aware of the implications of their vote and did not expect the Indonesian government to recognize Israel anytime soon.

Sukarno's policy of nonalignment drew a line not between capitalism and communism but between colonialism and anti-colonialism.²⁵ Israel's connections with the West and the rhetoric prevalent in the Third World regarding the connection between Zionism and colonialism reinforced his conviction that the Jewish state was in the colonialist camp. Sukarno took great pride in his decision to lead his country along a nonaligned path.²⁶ He called his opposition to neocolonialism NEKOLIM, which actually meant opposition to neocolonialism as practiced by Holland, Great Britain and the United States.²⁷ This precluded normal relations with Israel, which he regarded as a client state of the United States. Yet he admired certain aspects of Israeli society. He told Louis Fischer,

There is no qualitative difference between Western capitalism and Soviet state capitalism. There is no Communism in Russia. Only in India and Israel do some thousands of people live in free communes where everything is shared alike. Otherwise the world knows only capitalism in various phases or pre-capitalism as in less developed countries.²⁸

Nevertheless, he insisted on regarding Israel as an agent of colonialism and there was little that could be done to alter his position.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Indonesians were unanimous regarding their government's attitude toward Israel. Pro-Israeli attitudes were prevalent particularly among minorities who did not wish to be integrated into the Indonesian state. A careful perusal of the documents available in the Israel State Archives reveals that some of these groups were not only sympathetic to Israel but also tried to establish contacts with it. The most obvious attempt was made in the early summer of 1956. Believing that they could capitalize on Indonesia's hostility to Israel, dissidents in eastern Indonesia who refused to be integrated into the state approached Israel through J. Melkman, the Israeli Minister in Amsterdam, and asked to visit Israel. They stated that they were discriminated against by

the majority of the Indonesian population and oppressed by the government just as the Arabs oppressed the Jews prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. They argued that Israel was established under similar conditions and sought guidance in obtaining support for their struggle for independence. They expressed their conviction that their enemies were also Israel's enemies and asked to establish a brotherly alliance with Israel. Moreover, they made a commitment to support Israel in case of need with manpower and materiel. Their spokesmen stated that in case of an Arab-Israeli war 4,000 troops from Ambon, stationed in Holland at that time, would come to Israel's aid. Melkman reported the content of this conversation to the Foreign Ministry.²⁹ However, as one might have expected, the dissidents' request fell on deaf ears in Jerusalem. Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry understood all too well that supporting the dissidents would alienate Jakarta beyond repair.

The intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the mid-1950s made it even less likely that Israel would be capable of approaching Indonesia. Israel's collusion with Great Britain and France during the Suez Affair was harshly condemned throughout Asia and the Muslim world. To Sukarno, the Suez Affair was proof that imperialism was a genuine threat that had not disappeared.³⁰ Indonesia condemned the Suez Affair and even went as far as recommending sanctions against Israel. It was only after the dust had settled over the Suez Affair that the Israeli Foreign Ministry embarked once more on an attempt to normalize relations with Indonesia. In 1957, David Hacoheh and Yizhar Harari met the Indonesian Foreign Minister and raised the possibility of improving the relations between the two countries. The Indonesian Foreign Minister argued that since most Indonesian parliamentary members were Muslims he did not see a possibility that a radical change would take place in his government's attitude toward Israel.³¹ There was a slim hope that the bilateral relations would improve but this did not materialize due to dissension among the factions in Indonesia's Muslim parties. During Indonesia's struggle for independence the Muslims were united in one political organization called Masjumi (the Council of Indonesian Muslim Associations) which functioned effectively during the first years of the country's independence. In 1953, a section called Nahdatul Ulama (Association of Islamic Scholars) seceded from the organization and formed a separate party.³² This break reflected two different trends. While the Masjumi remained a party of urban middle-class members who favored a policy of economic expansion which did not preclude cooperation with the Western countries, Nahdatul Ulama was more traditional and isolationist. The Masjumi could have led Indonesia to closer relations with Israel. However, any hope that Indonesia would change its policy toward Israel dissipated when the Masjumi became involved in the regional rebellion of 1958. Sukarno decided to disband the party and thereby left the Nahdatul Ulama in a position of power. Nahdatul Ulama supported Sukarno's call for an independent foreign policy because it associated that policy with the preservation of Indonesia's tradition and national identity.³³

What prevented better relations between the two countries was also the fact that Indonesia was actively seeking the support of Arab and nonaligned nations for its opposition to the formation of Malaysia.³⁴ Concerned about offending Malaysia, the Israelis were in no position to support Sukarno on that issue. Moreover, Sukarno's campaign to gain the support of the Arab states on the issue of West Irian was successful. Both Nasser and Syria's President Shukri al-Kuwatly expressed their support. And when

Sukarno visited Egypt in January 1958, Indonesia's relations with Egypt seemed to have reached the peak of their cordiality.³⁵ Nevertheless, not all Indonesian officials ignored the advantages of better relations with Israel, whose accomplishments in small states like Burma, Nepal and Singapore had left a favorable impression on them. For example, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official had reported that Indonesia's Ambassador to London Burhanudin Mohamed Diah expressed his country's admiration for Israel saying that he regretted the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries and that he thought that both sides were to blame. He mentioned Israel's vote in the case of West Irian and said that although he understood why Israel voted for Holland, the Indonesian government regarded the vote as an act of hostility. Nevertheless, he warmly greeted his Israeli guest.³⁶

The anti-colonial atmosphere and the spirit of Bandung continued to cloud the bilateral relations. Being both Muslim and Asian in character, Indonesia continued to play a leading role in the anti-colonial and anti-Western campaign, and Soviet propaganda intensified that trend. Consequently, Indonesia opposed all Israeli attempts to gain acceptance in Asia. It refused to furnish travel documents to Israelis who wished to attend the Asian games that took place in 1962, and encouraged the opposition to India, whose representative in the Asian Games Council, G.D.Sondhi, favored Israeli participation. According to accounts by eyewitnesses, the Indonesian government encouraged the demonstrators who damaged the Indian Embassy in the autumn of 1962.³⁷ Israeli Foreign Ministry officials protested vigorously,³⁸ yet the anti-Israel attitude of the Indonesian government was not consistent. Despite its Islamic character and sympathy to the Arab cause it did not always yield to Arab pressure even during the Nasser era, when Pan-Arabism reached its climax. For example, when Egyptian officials asked Indonesia's Ambassador Muhammad Ali Chanafiah to demonstrate solidarity with the Arab cause by boycotting the Asian Seminar on Industry, the Ambassador refused, saying that none of the Muslim participants had decided to boycott the seminar and there was no reason why Indonesia should act differently.³⁹

Realizing that they could not hope to establish political ties with Indonesia, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry decided to try other venues. In a letter to an Israeli diplomat in Washington the Foreign Ministry instructed him to offer Indonesia cooperation in technical and educational fields. He was advised to use great discretion in talking about political issues. In the appropriate case he was told to use the following arguments in Israel's favor: (a) that supporting one side in the Arab-Israeli conflict lowered Indonesia's stature in the international arena; and (b) that normal ties with Israel would not lead to weakening of relations with the Arabs but only enhance reciprocity on their part.⁴⁰ The Indonesian government remained reluctant to embark on a step that would antagonize their Muslim population and jeopardize their ties with the Arab states. Yet Indonesian officials did not ignore the benefits which might accrue from cooperation with Israel in the technical and military fields. By the mid-1960s the Israeli defense industry had gained a reputation for the effectiveness of its arms and munitions and according to Israeli sources at The Hague, the Indonesians began exploring the possibility of obtaining Uzi submachine guns from Israel.⁴¹

When Suharto became Indonesia's President in March 1966 there was a glimmer of hope in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that the bilateral relations might improve. The

country's foreign policy during the Suharto era was under the direct control of Foreign Minister H. Adam Malik who sought to renounce Sukarno's aggressive policy and therefore decided to normalize relations with Malaysia and Singapore. Indonesia's efforts to approach China were less successful but indicated that the new regime was bent on improving its international standing. Malik announced that Indonesia's foreign policy was nonaligned and subordinated to its national interests. Indonesia applied for admission to the United Nations and was immediately accepted.⁴² But there were even more specific signs that raised hope in Jerusalem. In June 1966, Indonesia's Ambassador to Kathmandu told the Israeli Ambassador that the recent developments in Indonesia had strengthened the hand of the Christian elements in that country and that this could lead to a reassessment in Indonesia's Middle East policy.⁴³ Moreover, the US Embassy in Jakarta reported that the Indonesian Foreign Ministry had demonstrated an obvious tendency to establish diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel.⁴⁴ In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, Eytan wrote that the situation in Indonesia had changed radically and that this could be the appropriate time to see whether the attitude toward Israel had changed. He suggested that Israel take the necessary steps to establish informal contacts between the two countries.⁴⁵ Yet Indonesia's official stand remained distant, forcing the Foreign Ministry to approach the regime with great caution. In a letter to the Israeli Ambassador in Mexico the Director of the Asian Division in the Foreign Ministry wrote: 'At this moment there is no need for an uncoordinated personal initiative aimed at exploring the possibilities of contact between Israel and Indonesia. For reasons, which I cannot explain in detail, there is fear that such initiative might be counter productive.'⁴⁶ Another letter from the Foreign Ministry to an Israeli diplomat at The Hague read as follows:

We suggest that you encourage the feller [Mr Kloos the General Secretary of the Dutch Trade Union, NVV] to mention on proper occasions, positive things on Israel, which might interest the Indonesians in Israel and in the Histadrut in particular. There is no need to offer them anything concrete since this might lead to negative decisions. There is no need to talk to this feller about diplomatic relations or other formal ties.⁴⁷

Domestic pressure in Indonesia continued to discourage the government from improving the bilateral relations. Muslim parties and organizations were sensitive to any attempt made by the government to mend fences with Israel. For example, in an article published in *Data Masyarakat*, the bulletin of the Muslim party Jadtul Ulama, the writer said that Indonesia must reject all ties with Israel. It stated that ties with Israel stood in contradiction to the country's active policy recently adopted by the government. Indonesia, he added, should support the position of the Arab states vis-à-vis Israel and should absolutely refuse to apologize to Israel as a precondition to its participation in the games of Asia and Bangkok.⁴⁸

There were external pressures as well. The Arabs intensified their efforts to foil any attempts at normalization between the two countries. On 24 December 1966, Radio Baghdad announced that the Arab League appealed to its members to intensify their contacts with Indonesia and called their attention to the attempts made by Zionism to take

advantage of the recent changes, which had taken place in Indonesia. Baghdad blamed the Zionists for driving a wedge between Indonesia and the Arabs.⁴⁹ In his interview with a Middle East news agency, Suharto was quoted as having said that despite the changes which had taken place in his country, neither his support for the Palestinians nor his sympathy toward Egypt had diminished in any way.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the official statements of the Indonesian government indicated that its Middle East policy had changed considerably. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, the Israeli Ambassador to Tokyo reported the content of his conversation with the Indonesian Ambassador Major General Roekmito Hendraningrat. He wrote:

Indonesia's policy under Suharto is aiming at maintaining normal and cordial relations with all countries without exception. They are determined to abandon completely the previous policy, which did not take into consideration the national interest since it was tied to the Peking-Hanoi-Pyongyang axis. In this context they are advocating relations, for example with Taiwan and Israel. However, Suharto must tread carefully and very slowly due to the impact of the old school and that of Sukarno which still enjoys great support among the people. The changes in policy would receive constitutional confirmation in the elections due to take place in 1968, and until then there is need to maintain great care and discretion in a gradual progress toward new international relations.⁵¹

What would have been the fate of the bilateral relations if the Six Day War had not erupted is difficult to say. It is clear, however, that the outbreak of the war increased the tension between the two countries. Despite his statements regarding Indonesia's desire to establish cordial relations with all countries without exception, Malik was in no position to avoid expressions of sympathy with the Arab states following the closure of the Strait of Tiran by Nasser. Moreover, his remarks showed that he was clearly sympathetic to Nasser's request for the removal of the UN Emergency Force from the Gaza Strip. On 22 May 1967, several days after the crisis began, he said:

The Indonesian government observes the Middle East developments closely and considers it serious. The Indonesian government hopes for the abolishment of tension in the world and in the Middle East in particular. If the conflict is tolerated further, greater international flare-ups might be inevitable. Indonesia fully understands the proposal of the United Arab Republic to the United Nations on the withdrawal of the UNEF from the Gaza Strip.⁵²

On 7 June 1967 the Indonesian Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying that Indonesia was concerned about the recent events and called on the nations involved to refrain from actions which might complicate matters. On 13 June 1967, Malik stated that Indonesia would support the USSR's resolution calling for an emergency session of the United Nations as well as the Security Council's resolution calling for a cease-fire in the Middle East. Moreover, he stated his government's readiness to send troops to join a UN peace-keeping force. In a cabinet meeting on the situation in the Middle East he said, 'The Indonesian government is giving full support to the Arab nations because Indonesia opposes any kind of aggression.' He even went as far as saying that 'the Gulf of Aqaba is

a UAR territory'.⁵³ Nevertheless, even then Indonesia was not entirely hostile to Israel. Indonesia joined many countries that voted for UN Resolutions 242 and 338, which called upon Israel to withdraw its forces from all Arab-occupied territories and to allow the Palestinians to return to their homeland. Yet despite its consistent pro-Arab voting record in the United Nations, Indonesia's policy was not as hostile as its official statements suggested.

When Indonesia's Ambassador Rusman Djajakusuma met the Israeli Ambassador to Mexico he said that his government had embarked on a new policy toward Israel. He explained that his country refrained from immediately identifying with the Arabs when the Six Day War broke out but instead stated that the conflict should be resolved in a peaceful manner.⁵⁴ The Indonesian government did not lose sight of the advantages that could accrue from better relations with Israel. Indonesian officials who met their Israeli counterparts in the United Nations and in other informal gatherings had expressed keen interest in Israeli technical assistance, particularly in the agricultural field.⁵⁵ Moreover, Israel's spectacular success during the Six Day War impressed the Indonesians, who began asking it to sell arms. Arms deals were concluded but they remained secret.⁵⁶ Secrecy was maintained not only due to Indonesia's fear of Arab reaction but also due to domestic events. By the second half of 1967, the religious unrest in Indonesia intensified: Muslims attacked Christian churches in North Sumatra and South Sulawesi; Christian shrines in Makassar and South Sulawesi were desecrated; Christians were accused of proselytizing; and Muslim sentiments were inflamed.⁵⁷ Anxious to maintain tranquility in Indonesia the President called upon the Muslims to exercise tolerance. This was barely the time for a demonstration of good will toward Israel. Yet beneath the surface Indonesian officials showed appreciation for ties with Israel. Even among the Indonesian public there was considerable appreciation for the State of Israel. A careful perusal of the statements made by Indonesian officials reveals that the Indonesian government's attitude was far more moderate than its official announcements suggest. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, Z.Rafiach from the Israeli Embassy in Ankara informed his superiors in Jerusalem that the Indonesians were far from harboring hostility toward Israel. In fact, he said that they were extremely cordial. He quoted Indonesia's view regarding the Middle East as saying:

We pursue a realistic position and we believe that everyone should do likewise. Israel was established by the UN and it is a member in that organization. Whoever objects to its existence and demands to destroy it is like someone who demands the destruction of the UN and the denial of its authority. We are not identifying with such an approach... However, in our position toward the Middle East we have to take into consideration the Islamic factor which is an important and very influential factor in the context of our domestic relations in Indonesia. This factor limits our activities and expressions.⁵⁸

Despite these expressions of sympathy the Indonesian government remained extremely sensitive to Arab reaction and therefore avoided comments that could be interpreted as supportive of Israel. Officials in Jakarta were particularly careful to hide Indonesia's military contact with Israel. Thus, for example, in the summer of 1967, the Indonesian

Embassy in Baghdad issued a firm denial saying that the announcement made by Reuters News Agency that an Israeli military delegation had visited Indonesia was utterly false. The statement made by the Embassy accused Reuters of an attempt to harm the solidarity between Indonesia and the Arab states and Iraq in particular. Once again, the official statements mentioned the usual rhetoric regarding Indonesia's commitment to fighting neocolonialism. The announcement stated that Indonesia's support for the Arab states was based on the principle of opposition to imperialism and neocolonialism of all kinds and it made it clear that in the government's eyes Israel was the embodiment of an imperialist scheme to dominate all the countries of the Third World. Indonesia, the statement said, would therefore continue to support the struggle of the Arab nation and would not relinquish this principle.⁵⁹ In his address to the House of Representatives on the eve of Indonesia's Independence Day, Suharto said, 'The Indonesian nation therefore is opposed to any form of colonialism...and imperialism in all their forms and manifestations from whatever quarter they may come.'⁶⁰ However, when asked by a journalist about his country's relations with Israel the Indonesian Foreign Minister said on 29 August 1967 that 'Israel is a fact and it is a UN member and it would be absurd on the Arabs' part to ignore this. Indonesia did not recognize Israel out of fear that this might endanger its relations with the Arabs, however, it would follow in their footsteps if they decide on it tomorrow.'⁶¹ Likewise, Indonesia's official stand on the Palestinian refugee problem remained utterly supportive. An official statement from the Indonesian Embassy in Dar es Salaam made it clear that the support for the Palestinian cause would not diminish. It read in part: 'Indonesia is always taking the side of the Arabs in the Palestine Arab refugee problem till the problem be settled with Israel.'⁶²

This was Indonesia's official line but in their meetings with their Israeli counterparts Indonesian officials were far from hostile. In January 1968, the Israeli Ambassador in Dar es Salaam noted,

among the Muslim delegations here such as Pakistan, Somalia and Indonesia, the latter are treating us in a friendly and concrete fashion. We were not invited to the house of the Indonesian ambassador and I did not yet invite him to our house. However, we are meeting frequently in the houses of other ambassadors and the relations are free as if there were diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁶³

Apart from the radical pro-Muslim dailies, the Indonesian press was supportive of better relations with Israel. In the spring of 1968, the Israeli Ambassador in Mexico met Indonesia's Ambassador, who informed him that recently there had been articles in the Indonesian press stating that Israel was a *fait accompli* and that it was imperative to promote relations with it. He said that Indonesia was extremely sensitive to those countries capable of helping its development and therefore it did not pursue Sukarno's radical line. However, he said that Indonesia had to take into consideration the sensitivity of the Muslims and the Arab states and therefore the process of warming to Israel was slow.⁶⁴ It was largely due to the support of the Muslim factions that the Indonesian House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning Israel's occupation of Jerusalem on 15 November 1968.⁶⁵ Government officials were not averse to ties with

Israel but did not wish to be regarded as the ones who initiated the contacts. In order to escape criticism by the Muslims in Indonesia and by the Arab states they delivered messages to Israel through Holland and sometimes through organizations or private businessmen. For example, they informed M.Carnasa, a Jewish businessman from Amsterdam, that the Indonesian government was willing to discuss de facto recognition with Israel on the proviso that the initiative came from the Israelis and that Israel would agree to purchase Indonesian national bonds. Carnasa told Israeli officials that the Indonesians were sensitive to any accusations that they were the ones to initiate the contacts.⁶⁶

Asked to explain why his government had difficulty changing its traditional attitude toward Israel at that time an Indonesian official said that the situation in the Middle East militated against any possibility of a change of heart in Jakarta largely because the closure of the Suez Canal had an adverse effect on his country and there were no signs of progress in the Jarring peace mission.⁶⁷ All along, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry was careful to express solidarity with the Arabs. Its officials argued that Israel did not do enough to promote peace in the region.⁶⁸ However, in his meeting with an Israeli official in New York the Indonesian Foreign Minister said that his objective was to keep Indonesia out of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to pursue a neutral policy as a step toward establishing more open relations with Israel.⁶⁹ The failure of Jarring's mission and the subsequent outbreak of the War of Irritation along the Suez Canal compelled the Indonesian government to maintain a cautious attitude and to hide its contacts with Israel. However, the awareness that Israel had an extraordinary ability to assist in developing Indonesia's agriculture prevented the government from ignoring the Israeli efforts to establish contacts. Moreover, officials in Jakarta were aware of the clout which Israel and the leaders of the American Jewish community had on the policy-makers in Washington. Therefore, Israeli offers of assistance and cooperation did not fall on deaf ears in Jakarta. Not only was Indonesia open to Israeli offers of agricultural and scientific cooperation but also to cooperation in security matters. For quite some time the Israeli intelligence agencies had been exploring the possibility of obtaining a presence in Indonesia in order to monitor the activities of Muslim organizations hostile to Israel in that region. Mossad agents had expressed an interest in maintaining a presence in the area and argued that it would facilitate the military cooperation between the two countries. After unofficial negotiations with government officials the Indonesians agreed to allow the Mossad to operate in Indonesia on the proviso that the matter not be revealed to the Arabs and to the Muslims in Indonesia. Seeking to conceal the fact that it allowed the Mossad to operate in the country, the government concealed the organization's identity. According to a CIA report, the Mossad maintained a station in Jakarta under a commercial cover. By the early 1980s, the two countries had expanded their contacts to the military field. In the spring of 1980 a British source had disclosed that Israel had numerous military contracts with Indonesia.⁷⁰

The bilateral cooperation resulted more from the peculiar conditions in the areas surrounding Indonesia than from events in the Middle East. This was the primary concern of the Indonesian government and it based its policy primarily on pragmatic reasons that had a direct impact on its national security. Indonesia's solidarity with the Arab world and its sympathy with the plight of the Palestinian people remained secondary in its

foreign policy. Indonesia could always vote for pro-Arab resolutions in the United Nations and its officials could always condemn Israeli practices in the occupied territories with little risk of alienating Israel—accustomed to condemnation by most countries in the Third World the Israelis tended to ignore such statements. Although they expressed their indignation when Indonesian representatives made critical remarks against Israel there was a great deal of sympathy and understanding for Indonesia's predicament as a country with a large Muslim population. Moreover, Israeli diplomats were often told that the critical remarks and even the votes in the United Nations should not be taken too seriously. Such understanding allowed the Indonesian government to pursue its national security objectives with few recriminations from Israel and the Arab states.

Cooperation with Israel became imperative in the wake of Indonesia's war against East Timor. The need for a reliable source of arms and munitions compelled the government to search for suppliers wherever they could be found. In the spring of 1982, an Israeli source reported that Indonesia used Israeli arms in its war against East Timor.⁷¹ Israel was reported to have been selling used US aircraft to Indonesia. But unlike Israel's sale of arms to China at the turn of the century this was done with Washington's knowledge and on its initiative. According to one study, Israel had sold arms to Indonesia in 1980; among these items were 16 Skyhawk aircraft.⁷² Moreover, US officials at the Pentagon claimed that Israel had shipped 16 A4 fighters and that the sales continued.⁷³ Yet Jakarta found it impossible to normalize relations with Israel because public opinion remained opposed to such a move. The pro-Palestinian mood was prevalent in all sections of Indonesian society and Israel's attitude toward the peace process was a subject of criticism from all quarters. For example, when the Eighth UN seminar on the Palestinian question was held in Jakarta in May 1983, its report stated that the Palestinian people had an inalienable right to sovereignty in their land and that the restoration of Palestinian rights was a *sine qua non* to any solution of the Middle East conflict. Moreover, it stated that the PLO should be recognized as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The fact that the seminar was sponsored by the Indonesian government and that Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja opened its first session reinforced the anti-Israeli arguments of its participants. The report concluded that the Israeli occupation must come to an end and the participants called upon the United Nations not to recognize Israel's annexation of Jerusalem. Moreover, it recommended that steps be taken to inform the public in Asia about Israel's violation of human rights in the occupied territories.⁷⁴

The IDF's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the murders in Sabra and Shatila led many Indonesian government officials to condemn Israel. Thus, for example, Member of the House Committee on Defense, Foreign Affairs and Information H.M.Amin Iskandar condemned the United States for supporting Israeli aggression in Lebanon, and when a peacekeeping force was sent to Lebanon he argued that this was done in order to protect the Israeli occupation forces. Moreover, he said that the agreement reached in June 1983 served the interests of the Israeli occupiers who were bent on destroying the PLO. He concluded by saying that Israel must withdraw from Lebanon in the interest of peace.⁷⁵

In July 1984 Indonesia allowed the PLO to open an office in Jakarta and Arafat was invited to visit the country.⁷⁶ Acting Foreign Office Secretary Yacoub al-Kindi reiterated his country's 'absolute' support for the Palestinians.⁷⁷ In his speech at the 39th session of the UN General Assembly Foreign Minister Ali Atalas said that the PLO had the right to

play a role in every effort to reach a settlement of the Palestinian question and called upon the United Nations to reassess its position in this matter.⁷⁸ Sympathy for the Palestinians was expressed by numerous Muslim organizations throughout the country. For example, Lukman Harun, Deputy Chairman of the Islamic Institute, Muhammadiyah, told the press that the time had come that all peace-loving UN members order Israel to bring an end to the brutal means that it was using in order to suppress the Palestinian people. He also blamed Israel for turning Jerusalem into a Jewish city and called upon the Muslim countries to support the Palestinian cause.⁷⁹ Shortly before the outbreak of the Intifada in the occupied territories, Suharto met PLO special envoy Sami Musallam and reaffirmed his support for the Palestinian struggle and for the efforts aimed at achieving a negotiated settlement.⁸⁰

Indonesia's pro-Palestinian utterances continued throughout the 1980s and intensified in the wake of the Intifada. By the end of December 1987, the Indonesian government condemned Israel for its attempts to suppress the Intifada. In a statement by the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, Israel was blamed for violating the Geneva Convention's regulations regarding the protection of civilians in wartime. The statement said that Indonesia deplored the tragic developments that were caused by the Israeli illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, it stated that Israel's brutal measures were undermining the prospects of peace in the region and that they were liable to worsen the situation.⁸¹

The beginning of the peace process raised hopes both in Jerusalem and Jakarta that a new period in the bilateral relations was about to begin. However it was not until the end of 1993 that the Indonesian government addressed the issue of recognizing Israel. Suharto's position as the Head of the Nonaligned Movement did not allow him to ignore the Palestinian issue that was debated intensely by its members. In January 1993 he decided to demonstrate his sympathy toward the Palestinians by authorizing the Palestine Commission, which condemned Israel for deporting Palestinians accused of complicity in terrorist activities, to investigate this matter.⁸² By September 1993, it seemed as if a breakthrough in the bilateral relations had occurred when Israel and the Palestinians reached an accord allowing the Palestinians to exercise self-rule in Jericho and the Gaza Strip. Unofficially, Indonesian officials expressed optimism and told their Israeli counterparts that the government would reassess its policy toward Israel but they thought it prudent to exercise caution. Suharto asked Israel and the Palestinians to respect the agreement; however, his appeal to Israel to keep all its promises, including a withdrawal of its troops from the West Bank and Gaza⁸³ seemed more like criticism and distrust. Although it welcomed Israel's peace accord with the Palestinians, the Indonesian government remained undecided regarding the issue of diplomatic relations with Israel and denied reports by journalists that actual steps to that effect had been taken. A Foreign Ministry spokesman in Jakarta said: 'We will watch the development of this process first, especially its implementation.' He had also quoted Foreign Minister Atalas as saying: 'We welcome the breakthrough. We also hope the parties concerned obey the agreement and all interim and transitional arrangements will be conducted in a greater framework and objective.'⁸⁴ Indonesian officials told their Israeli counterparts that the agreement was only the first step and that they would like to see concrete progress leading to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. The Indonesian House of Representatives

had a similar response. Deputy Chairman of the House Commission for Foreign Affairs Information Science and Security argued that no solution to the Middle East problem could be found unless a Palestinian state were established.⁸⁵ At the same time Suharto avoided comments about the future of the bilateral relations. He told journalists that he hoped that the agreement would become a breakthrough for a complete and just solution to the Middle East conflict.⁸⁶ When asked about the possible impact that the negotiations would have on the bilateral relations, government sources in Jakarta stated that Indonesia was still undecided about opening diplomatic relations with Israel because it was waiting to see the results of the peace process.

Concerned about the reaction of Muslims throughout the world the Indonesian government decided to appear less willing to mend fences with Israel. Atal hardened his position and said that Indonesia would not recognize Israel as long as its dispute with the Palestinians remained unresolved. He said, 'We'll wait and see, because the implementation is still difficult.'⁸⁷ Another reason for Indonesia's inability to recognize Israel was the pressure exerted by government officials and scholars who had occasionally written about the topic. For example, Dr Riza Sihbudi of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences argued that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel would contradict Indonesia's foreign policy, which opposed oppression and confiscation of land. He said that Israel was oppressing the Palestinians and that the IDF must withdraw from the occupied territories before any step toward recognition was taken. Moreover, he argued that concluding diplomatic ties with Israel would harm Indonesia's national interests because,

This could create the impression that Indonesia is receptive to oppression, and could heat-up the situation at home that would disturb the interests of national development... If the two countries open diplomatic relations before this [Palestinian] problem is settled, that would mean that the Indonesian people were ignoring the fundamental principles of their own constitution.⁸⁸

Encouraged by the progress of the Middle East peace process, Suharto agreed to meet Rabin, who was on a tour to the Far East in October 1993. The meeting took place at the Cendana Presidential Palace.⁸⁹ The decision whether or not to honor Rabin's request to meet Suharto was hotly debated in Indonesian government circles. Most officials argued that Indonesia should wait and see if the outcome of the peace process led to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state. Others, like Abu Hasan Sazili and Aminullah Ibrahim, argued that Suharto's position as the Head of the Nonaligned Movement enabled him to pressure Rabin to comply with all resolutions pertaining to Palestine and therefore were in favor of Rabin's visit.⁹⁰ The idea that Suharto could use his influence as the Head of the Nonaligned Movement was shared by government officials and scholars in Indonesia.⁹¹ Rabin's visit was the first by an Israeli Prime Minister to Indonesia. The visit was criticized by the media particularly in radical countries such as Syria, Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Iran. Also vocal were the organs of Muslim organizations both at national and local level. Anxious to ward off the mounting criticism, Indonesian officials argued that the visit had nothing to do with Israeli-Indonesian relations. Murdiono Said, Indonesia's State Secretary, explained that Suharto received Rabin in his capacity as the

Head of the Nonaligned Movement rather than as the Indonesian head of state.⁹²

Despite the enthusiasm which resulted from the peace accord with the Palestinians, the Indonesian government was far from ready to make such a drastic move because the peace process did not go smoothly and there were other issues which prevented a smooth reappraisal in Indonesia's Middle East policy. On 1 November 1993, the Indonesian government condemned the Israeli Supreme Court's verdict stating that the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock were part of Israel's territory.⁹³ A spokesman for the Indonesian government reiterated that diplomatic relations with Israel were contingent upon the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the evacuation of all Arab territories. Moreover, he said that Jakarta would establish diplomatic relations only if they served the interest of the Indonesian people. When asked about this matter B.N.Marbun, a legislator who yielded considerable influence on Indonesia's foreign-policy-making, stated that he and Atalas had not considered establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Similar statements were made by Suharto. During his visit to Tunisia in November of that year he stated that he welcomed the positive developments in the peace process and expressed hope that this would be a step toward the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state.⁹⁴ Shortly afterwards he gave Arafat a US\$2 million grant as part of US\$5 million which Indonesia had pledged to the Palestinians. Arafat took the opportunity to ask Suharto to use his influence as the Head of the Nonaligned Movement to pressure Israel to implement the peace agreement.⁹⁵ Despite these expressions of sympathy for the Palestinians the enthusiasm generated by the peace accord continued to gain momentum.

By December 1993, there were reports that diplomatic relations were about to be established between the two countries by the end of that month.⁹⁶ However, even then there were many obstacles to overcome. Renewed tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians caused concern in Jakarta and discouraged the government from taking steps toward the establishment of diplomatic relations. The Indonesian government continued to cast doubt on the sincerity of the Israelis. In January 1994, Atalas announced that any consideration of diplomatic relations with Israel was premature since 'Israel still violates what is written in our constitution; it is still a conquering regime and it did not yet allow self-determination to the Palestinians.'⁹⁷ At the same time, however, Suharto saw little harm in establishing economic ties with Israel.⁹⁸

While the Indonesian government seemed to have hardened its position on the issue of diplomatic relations with Israel, contacts on the unofficial level intensified. In November 1994, Abdurrahman Wahid, Chairman of Nahdatul Ulama, which became one of the world's largest Muslim organizations with more than 30 million followers, arrived in Israel. Wahid led a five-man Indonesian academic delegation invited to Israel by the Truman Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to participate in a two-day seminar on Judaism and Islam. This was the first such visit by an Indonesian delegation. Wahid was careful not to commit his government to recognizing Israel. He stressed that his organization did not represent the Indonesian government. Foreign Ministry officials accompanied the group, whose members met Rabin, Beilin and Chief of Staff Ehud Barak. They also attended the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. Impressed by the Israeli achievements, Wahid said that his country could learn from the Israelis in many areas, stating that his country needed Israeli technology. Wahid explained to his

Israeli hosts that there was a great deal of sympathy in his country for Israel and that Israelis wishing to enter Indonesia could do so after obtaining a visa. He also said that as the Head of the Nonaligned Movement, Suharto 'has to take into consideration the feelings of those who oppose' diplomatic relations with Israel. Another guest, the chairman of the Surabaya Press Club, argued that his countrymen were eager to learn from Israel. He added, 'We have very little news from the Middle East...this makes our perspective very shallow. I am afraid that our understanding is based more on religious sentiment than on honest comprehension.'⁹⁹

The most significant news, however, came from Johan Effendi, another member of the Indonesian delegation and Suharto's confidant, who told the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry that Indonesia would soon establish diplomatic relations with Israel. In addition, Effendi revealed that his government had decided on cooperation with Israel, particularly in agriculture.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the change in Indonesia's policy toward Israel was not as radical as the Israelis had hoped. Atalas made it absolutely clear that, As long as the Palestinian people have not achieved their goals and the Arab—Israeli disputes are not completely resolved, we do not intend to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.'¹⁰¹ Reacting to recommendations made by a prominent Muslim scholar that since the peace process had begun in earnest, Indonesia should consider establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, Andi Mappisameng, Director General of the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, announced in January 1995, that 'Our position on Israel has not changed. We will continue to deny entry permits to Israeli tourists.'¹⁰²

Rabin's assassination discouraged many Indonesians who had hoped that the peace process would lead to the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Reacting to the assassination, Suharto offered his condolences and expressed the hope that Rabin's absence would not derail the Middle East peace process. He reaffirmed his commitment to the peace process and expressed hope that it would lead to the recognition of Palestinian rights.¹⁰³ However, the events that unfolded after Rabin's assassination disappointed all those who had hoped for a solution to the conflict. The rise of the right-wing Likud government under Netanyahu dealt a major blow to the normalization process. Officials in Jakarta were dismayed at the Likud's statements regarding Israel's unwillingness to trade land for peace. Netanyahu's willingness to give the Arabs 'peace for peace' left many Indonesian government officials suspicious of Israel's aims and the slowdown in the peace process led many to retract their former statements about granting recognition to Israel. It is hardly surprising therefore, that when Netanyahu asked to visit Indonesia in the summer of 1997 on his way to the Far East, the Indonesian government turned down the request saying that his government's hawkish stand slowed down the peace process and thus made it impossible to normalize relations with Israel.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, as the century drew to a close the Indonesian government seemed willing to soften its approach. Partial explanation for this change was the US commitment to provide Indonesia with foreign aid.¹⁰⁵ This period also witnessed a process of rapprochement between Indonesia and the moderate Arab states.

After a period of tense relations with Saudi Arabia, which followed the execution of an Indonesian national by Saudi Arabia, the relations warmed up. In October 1998, both sides agreed to open new refineries in Indonesia with an American investment of US\$7.5 billion.¹⁰⁶ Relations with Egypt warmed up as well. Later that month Indonesia's

President Bacharuddin Yusuf Habibie was received by President Mubarak and both sides discussed ways to promote the bilateral trade. In addition, an Egyptian delegation of 125 members arrived in Jakarta to attend the international trade exhibition.¹⁰⁷ This process of rapprochement with the moderate countries of the Middle East raised hope in Washington that Indonesia had become indispensable for peace in its region and a contributor to peace in the Middle East by virtue of its Islamic character and its ties with the moderate Arab regimes. This was an image that Habibie sought to enhance by expressing support for the peace process.

In the spring of 1999 the daily, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, reported that Indonesia appeared ready to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. According to the report, the Israeli Ambassador to Singapore visited Indonesia, where he met the President and some of his aides. The paper also reported that some of Indonesia's Islamic societies such as Nahdatul Ulama had been advocating diplomatic relations with Israel. According to the same source, Indonesia's political parties opposed the move.¹⁰⁸ The Indonesian government did not rush to establish relations with Israel and the progress remained slow despite the fact that many Indonesian journalists came to Israel and many Israelis found it easier to enter Indonesia.¹⁰⁹ Unwilling to antagonize the Muslims, the Indonesian government remained very cautious and delayed the normalization process. The failure of the peace process and the outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa received much coverage in the Indonesian press, consequently hindering the normalization process.

The attempts to reach Indonesia began in the early years of the Jewish state's existence. However, it was not until recently that the Israeli Foreign Ministry began investing much effort in that direction. Israel's tendency to give priority to its connections with the West was largely responsible for that omission. Nevertheless, appreciative of the country's size, its geographic location and the fact that it has the largest Muslim population in the world, the Israeli Foreign Ministry began investing greater efforts in order to gain Indonesia's recognition. All along, the Indonesian government made it clear that the possibility of better relations with Indonesia was contingent upon the success of the peace process.¹¹⁰ This has been Indonesia's firm stand from the beginning and it is precisely the failure of the peace process which continues to stand in the way of better relations. On the diplomatic level, Jakarta remained distant from Israel due to its commitment to Muslim solidarity. Nevertheless, there were numerous contacts and meetings between officials of both countries and the commercial dealings continued. The fact that Indonesia is a leading member in the Nonalignment Movement (NAM) leaves it little choice but to identify with the anti-Western sentiments of its members and this includes opposition to Israel. The Likud's settlement policy in East Jerusalem has alienated the movement's leaders, who decided to freeze relations with Israel in order to 'give a strong message to Israel that NAM, which represents two-thirds of the United Nations is opposed to their plan which is jeopardizing the Middle East peace process'.¹¹¹ Given its long history of association with the Nonalignment Movement and the pressure exerted by its members, Jakarta is unlikely to improve relations with Israel until significant progress has been made toward peace in the Middle East.

NOTES

1. Director of the Asian Division to Foreign Minister, ISA 2559/7, 13 March 1950.
2. Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen joined other Asian countries which gathered at the New Delhi Conference on 23 January 1949, and passed resolutions that were forwarded to the Security Council. They recommended that members of the Republican Government and other leaders should be released by the Dutch authorities and handed back to the Republic to enable it to function freely; that an interim government, composed of the representatives of the Republic and of non-Republican territories, which gained the confidence of the Indonesian people be formed by 15 March 1949; that elections for the Constituent Assembly be completed by 1 October 1949, and that power to the whole of Indonesia be completely transferred by January 1950. I. Chaudhry, *The Indonesian Struggle* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1950), pp. 204–5.
3. Shimoni to Amir, ISA 2559/7, 2 December 1949.
4. Rosner to Eytan, ISA 2259/7, 4 December 1949.
5. Shimoni to Rosner, ISA 2559/7, 6 December 1949.
6. Shimoni to Pollack, ISA 2558/8, 24 January 1950.
7. A telegram from Indonesia's President A. Sukarno, ISA 2559/7, 13 January 1950.
8. Shimoni to Simke, ISA 2559/7, 3 September 1951.
9. Pape to Simke, ISA FO 2559/7, 23 September 1951.
10. Shimoni to Israel's Embassy in Washington, ISA FO 2559/7, 25 November 1951.
11. *Pakistan Times*, 26 July 1952.
12. Givon to Levavy, ISA 2559/7, 1952.
13. Divon to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2561/6, 22 January 1952.
14. Givron to Simke, ISA 2559/7, 18 August 1952.
15. Brumer to Mechamed, 28 April 1953; Barkatt to Tanja, 17 July 1959. Aynor, Avimor and Kaminer (eds), *The Role of the Israel Labor Movement*, pp. 88–9.
16. Lewin to Amir, ISA 2559/7, 11 February 1953.
17. Eytan to Lewin, ISA 2559/7, 11 August 1953.
18. Eshed to Israel's Minister in Moscow, ISA 2559/7, 4 April 1954.
19. Zippori to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/7, 18 August 1954.
20. Zippori to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2560/9, 28 June 1954.
21. A written reply from Foreign Minister to PSI Deputy on refusal of visa to Israeli Delegate to Asian Socialist Congress, ISA 2560/9, 9 July 1954.
22. When Indonesia became involved in a conflict with the Dutch over West Irian, Israel joined Taiwan, Turkey and the Union of South Africa in opposing Indonesia's claim. This vote had clearly demonstrated that Israel's tendency to associate itself with the countries of the West was still pronounced in its foreign-policy-making. Despite Israel's efforts to reach out to the countries of Asia, relations with the countries of Western Europe loomed larger on the agenda of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Holland's sympathetic attitude toward the Jews during the Nazi Holocaust was another reason for the Israeli vote.
23. Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 117–18, 133.

24. Gazit to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2559/7, 7 July 1955.
25. F.W.Speed, *Indonesia Today* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1971), p. 73; all world conflicts were interpreted in light of this distinction. For example, in a joint commu-niqué with Nasser on troop withdrawal from Congo, both praised the emergence of the Republic of Congo under Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and expressed support for its struggle against colonialism. At the same time, General Mobutu's regime was said to have been a tool of colonialism. 'Joint Declaration of Indonesia—U.A.R. on Withdrawal of Troops from Congo', *Djakarta Dispatches*, Embassy of Indonesia, 13 December 1960, pp. 8–10; 19 December 1960, p. 1.
26. The Indonesian press had proudly published a letter from the eminent philosopher, Bertrand Russell, to Sukarno, which read in part: 'Yours is one of the countries not committed to either the Eastern or the Western bloc, and I believe it is to such countries that the world must look for a degree of sanity which, so far had been lacking in the powers that threaten the existence of mankind.' *Djakarta Dispatches*, 21 December 1960, pp. 7–8.
27. Allen M.Sievers, *The Mystical World of Indonesia: Culture and Economic Development in Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 185.
28. Louis Fischer, *The Story of Indonesia* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 305.
29. Melkman to Lewin, ISA 2559/7, 15 July 1956.
30. The People and the Suez Crisis', *The Indonesian Spectator*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (10 November 1956), p. 6.
31. Indonesia's Foreign Minister's interview with Harari, *Haboker*, 7 September 1962.
32. The Nahdatul Ulama left because its members felt that the Masjumi failed to give the Muslim scholars an important role in the party's policy-making. For a detailed discussion of this issue see 'Contemporary Political Thought of the Moslems of Indonesia', Address by Munawir Sjadzali, an Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Washington, DC, delivered at the Islamic Center in Washington. *Report on Indonesia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (January–February 1957), pp. 15–20.
33. Stephen Sloan, *A Study in Political Violence: The Indonesian Experience* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Company, 1971), pp. 30–1.
34. 'Indonesia Seek Arabs and Non-Aligned Support Against Malaysia', ISA 3384/27, n.d.
35. 'Successful Mission of President Sukarno: Warm Support for Claim on West Irian', *The Indonesian Spectator*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1 February 1958), pp. 11–12.
36. Lourie to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3384/24, 21 May 1963.
37. *New York Times*, 7 September 1962.
38. Shimoni to Avrech, ISA 3384/24, 5 October 1962.
39. Ramati to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3988/3, 24 February 1966.
40. Elitzur to Nevo, ISA 3988/3, 8 May 1966.
41. Ya'ari to Elitzur, ISA 3988/11, 21 February 1966.
42. Sievers, *The Mystical World*, p. 248.
43. Er'el to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3988/3, 29 May 1966.
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Malaysia—A Diplomatic Blunder

Unlike Israel's relations with Indonesia those with Malaysia¹ went from one extreme to the other. Initially, Malaya's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had much sympathy toward Israel but later turned his back on it and asked its representative to leave the country. This was one of those rare cases in which an Israeli diplomat was declared *persona non grata* and was asked to leave the country.

Israel's attempts to reach Malaya began in the early 1960s. However, there were insurmountable difficulties from the very beginning. The country's Islamic character and its Chinese minority were major obstacles which stood in the way of better relations between the two countries. Leading the attempt to approach Malaya was a young Israeli diplomat, Moshe Yegar, who served in Rangoon and was sent to Kuala Lumpur in 1960, as a representative of the Israeli Football Association. Yegar visited Kuala Lumpur again in 1962, where he met the Tunku. The meeting did not produce tangible results and the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not expect an immediate change in Malaya's attitude toward Israel.

After the establishment of the Malaysian federation the Israeli Foreign Ministry made another attempt to establish contact with the Tunku. In 1964, Yegar arrived at Kuala Lumpur as a commercial representative. The assumption was that once he was established as a legitimate representative in Malaysia his office would turn into a diplomatic representation. However, several factors militated against the success of his mission. Intense Muslim resistance to relations with Israel manifested itself from the outset. The resistance came both from the opposition and from within the ruling coalition. The dispute between Malaya and Indonesia compounded the difficulties. Seeking to participate in the nonaligned conference scheduled to take place in Algiers, in June 1965, and to obtain Arab support for its struggle against Indonesia, the Malaysian government refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Moreover, Singapore's secession from the Malaysian federation in September 1965 strengthened the country's Muslim character and its resistance to normal relations with Israel intensified.

In November 1965 the Tunku announced that his country would not recognize the State of Israel nor allow its team to play football in Kuala Lumpur and in the following month Yegar was ordered to leave the country. Thereafter, Yegar made strenuous attempts to convince the Israeli government to renew its efforts to reach Malaysia by various means such as effective pressure from the United States and intensive trading activity. However, the two countries remained distant until the onset of the Middle East peace process, but the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries still remains to be achieved. The following pages trace the evolution of the bilateral relations from the very beginning and attempt to explain the reasons for Kuala Lumpur's reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

The possibility of establishing ties with Malaya was first discussed in September in 1956, when the Israeli Minister in Bangkok told Sharett that Israel should send a representative or a consul to Kuala Lumpur before the end of 1957, when the British were scheduled to withdraw, so that independent Malaya would already be accustomed to Israeli presence. He argued that it was much easier for an existing condition to persist in an oriental country with a Muslim majority and extremely difficult for a new condition to emerge, particularly with regard to attitudes toward Israel.²

The first meeting between Israel and Malaya took place on 4 October 1956, when Sharett visited Kuala Lumpur, where he met the Tunku who was then a veteran minister and a candidate for the premiership. Sharett's first impression was that the Tunku seemed sympathetic toward Israel.³ He questioned Sharett regarding the goals of the Zionist movement and inquired whether there was any danger of Israeli expansion. Endeavoring to achieve concrete results, Sharett suggested that an Israeli consul be nominated to Kuala Lumpur and that his position be upgraded after Malaya's independence. According to Sharett, the Tunku's response was 'unhesitatingly positive' and he welcomed the suggestion. The Tunku said that Malaya was not independent yet and that all depended on the approval of the British Foreign Office but he reassured his guest that 'we would consider that an honor to accept an Israeli representative'.⁴ This favorable attitude was in no small measure a product of Malaya's general foreign policy orientation in those early years. Unlike Indonesia, which sought a dominant role in the Nonalignment Movement, Malaya's policy was defined by its officials as 'neither aligned nor nonaligned'.⁵ Malaya was concerned mainly with its own affairs and had little inclination to play a significant role in world politics. In September 1957, Malaya's King or Yang dipertuan Agong said in the Legislative Council,

My government intends to concentrate on home affairs and does not propose to dissipate the resources of the country by building up an elaborate foreign service or very large armed forces. There will be no startling policy in the field of external affairs. It is the intention of my government to be on the most friendly terms with all countries in the world.⁶

Apart from occasional statements that condemned Western interference in Asian affairs or military actions against Arab states, the government did not dwell much on foreign affairs.⁷ It was largely due to this approach and to the lack of trained personnel that Malaya made no attempts to establish a large diplomatic corps and the number of its diplomatic missions throughout the world was small. Moreover, neither the Tunku nor his successors could rival the charisma of other leaders in South-East Asia and therefore did not seek to adopt an ambitious foreign policy. Malaya was not aligned with any power bloc and did not become a proponent of nonalignment. While promoting regional cooperation in South-East Asia the Malayan government maintained its defense treaty with Great Britain and opposed communism.

That Malaya could not be considered a nonaligned nation becomes clear from its inability and unwillingness to meet the criteria for nonalignment established at a preparatory meeting that took place in Cairo in June 1961, before the Belgrade Conference of September 1961. These criteria stipulated that in order to qualify as

nonaligned the country should adopt an independent foreign policy based on co-existence with other states and that it should be nonaligned or show a trend in favor of nonalignment. Moreover, admission to the nonaligned club was contingent upon the country's willingness to support all movements of national liberation and to refrain from becoming a member of multilateral military alliances concluded in the context of the global conflict. It was specifically stated that if the country were to enter into a military alliance with a great power, or allow it to maintain bases, this should not be in the context of the bipolar conflict.⁸ By these standards, Malaya could be accepted as a nonaligned country. It supported movements for national liberation throughout the world and neither its defense treaty with Britain nor its consent to allow Great Britain to maintain bases in the country was related to the global conflict. Yet Malaya was not recognized as a nonaligned nation largely because it did not demonstrate any desire to be considered as such. Although Malaya did not join the Western bloc it did not oppose military alliances such as SEATO that were formed in order to contain communism. Above all, Malaya was not willing to become entangled in larger issues of world politics in which nonaligned nations were involved.⁹ By adopting such policy Malaya not only avoided entanglement in the global conflict but also kept a distance from Nasser, who led the Arab world in opposition to Israel. By contrast, Indonesia's relations with Egypt were close by virtue of the nonaligned character of the two regimes. The Tunku's early pro-Israeli sentiments were a clear reflection of Malaya's reluctance to become part of the nonaligned camp. Unlike other Asian countries, Malaya did not rush to open embassies in Arab states or even to obtain their support in the United Nations. Since Malaya did not wish to become involved in major world events there was no urgent need to enlist the many votes which the Arab states had in the United Nations and its agencies, and the Middle East did not seem sufficiently important to warrant much effort. As Peter Boyce put it:

In the relatively innocent and uneventful years 1957–1962, Malaya did not extend its diplomatic interests in the Muslim world beyond Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Malay theological students gravitated to Al Azhar University in Cairo and the pilgrims to Mecca, but beyond President Nasser's prominence in non-alignment diplomacy, the Middle East did not seem particularly relevant to Malayan foreign policy.¹⁰

The subsequent desire of the Malayan government to distance itself from Israel was dictated by mounting Muslim opposition at home and abroad and was not a by-product of established foreign policy principles. That the Malayan government could maintain a favorable attitude toward the Jewish state was largely due to the fact that Muslim opposition at home was not strong in the early years. The Malay Muslims were not involved much in questions of foreign policy in those days. The main Muslim organizations concerned themselves with social problems such as the position of women in Malay society, the rate of divorce and prostitution and even the most extreme PMIP that was formed in 1953 concerned itself mainly with the position of Islam in Malay society and not with foreign policy issues.¹¹

Occupied with more urgent matters, the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not seem eager to invest efforts in Malaya and that country remained marginal on its agenda. It was only in

February 1957 that Foreign Ministry officials began contacting their British counterparts in an attempt to obtain permission to open a consulate in Singapore. The British Foreign Office forwarded the message to the Malayans but received no reply from Kuala Lumpur. Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem assumed that the response was negative.¹² In a telegram dated 26 August 1957, Ben Gurion informed the Tunku that Israel was looking forward to establishing an appropriate representation in Kuala Lumpur. Hoping that Malaya would welcome its friendly overtures, Israel voted for its admission to the United Nations, but again there was no response from Kuala Lumpur.

On 12 December 1957, the Tunku criticized Malayan officials who pressured him into denying Israel recognition. In a speech to the Malayan Parliament he said, 'Certain people demanded that Malaya not recognize Israel, but I think that this is an exaggerated demand. Israel is one of the countries which voted for Malaya's admission to the UN and not recognizing Israel would be a step of extreme ingratitude.'¹³ He was careful to stress, however, that his comments should not be interpreted as a commitment to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and whenever approached by Israeli diplomats regarding the issue he argued that the lack of trained diplomatic personnel prevented him from taking such a step.

By the end of December 1957, Foreign Ministry officials in Kuala Lumpur indicated that there was intense opposition to Malaya's recognition of Israel and that they had no intention whatsoever of establishing diplomatic relations with it. The Israeli Foreign Ministry took no action until the late summer of 1959. On 27 August 1959 Malaya's delegation member to the United Nations, Muhammad Sophe, told his Israeli counterpart that the increasing strength of the religious parties in Malaya made it impossible to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The Tunku made a similar statement in his meeting with Moshe Yovel, Israel's Minister to Sydney, on 10 November 1959. Realizing that efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Malaya were not likely to yield positive results, officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry sought to establish contacts at a lower level. They informed the Malayan government that they were willing to send a representative without reciprocity but stated that if this was unacceptable they would send a Histadrut member or someone else in any capacity. However, the Tunku, who had left the country at that moment, was not briefed about this message. Further contacts between Israeli and Malayan ambassadors took place during 1960 but did not lead to any progress.

Malayan leaders had repeatedly stated that they did not have anything against ties with Israel. They indicated that they would have liked to establish diplomatic relations but said that they feared both Muslim opposition and Arab resistance. On 20 June 1960, the Malay Ambassador Tunku Ismail bin Tunku Yahya sent a letter to Eytan in which he reiterated the Prime Minister's argument that it was impossible to establish ties with Israel due to a lack of trained personnel.¹⁴ This argument sounded less than convincing to Israeli Foreign Ministry officials whose attitude was that relations with Malaya were not crucial at that time. It was this nonchalant attitude that was responsible for the failure of Israel's diplomacy in Malaya which culminated in hostility toward Israel and led to Yegar's unfortunate expulsion from Kuala Lumpur.¹⁵

Another opportunity to approach Kuala Lumpur presented itself in August 1960, when Israel was invited to take part in games sponsored by the Asian Football Confederation. Yegar was chosen as the Israeli representative. On that occasion he had the opportunity to

meet representatives of many Asian nations and Malay dignitaries, including the Tunku himself. In addition, he contacted members of the Malayan government, some of whom expressed great sympathy toward Israel, but none of these meetings led to any concrete step.¹⁶ One of the Malaysians who expressed sympathy toward Israel was the Secretary General of the National Union of Rubber Plantations P.P.Narayanan, who explained to Yegar that diplomatic relations with Israel were not a realistic goal at that time because the PMIP was extremely hostile to Israel and it was in a position to harass the government despite the fact that it had little electoral power. His advice to Yegar was that the Israelis should try to penetrate Malaya slowly and 'through as many cracks as possible' by establishing ties with any organization and to wait patiently until that party became weak. He also suggested that Israel appeal to the British Foreign Office for help in that direction.¹⁷ Narayanan believed that the Israeli socialist system could serve as a model for all Asian nations and as such it could be instrumental in gaining friends for Israel.

Yegar had another opportunity to meet the Tunku, who informed him that Israel's desire to participate in the Merdeka Football Festival in Malaya could not be honored due to opposition from fanatic Muslim opposition groups. Yegar's meeting with the Director General of Malaya's Foreign Ministry Shafie al-Ghazali sheds further light on the difficulties which the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel entailed. Al-Ghazali expressed interest in ties with Israel. However, he explained that his government would not be able to invite the Israeli team due to the high cost involved. He added that any future decision as to whether or not to let an Israeli team participate in games sponsored by Malaya depended on the complications that such a step might cause. He went on to say that Malaya's reluctance to establish ties with Israel had nothing to do with Arab pressure; that his government's foreign policy was completely independent; and that it would not tolerate intervention by anyone. The government's only concern, he said, was pressure from Muslims within the country. These Muslims, he said, had a strong sense of solidarity with the Arabs, whom they regarded as their brethren. He added that as long as the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted the Muslims in Malaya would tend to support the Arabs and that any step taken by the Malayan government designed to establish ties with Israel would be likely to raise strong objections. Therefore, he said that his government was in no mood to create new problems, particularly after the long-drawn-out communist rebellion in the country and since Malaya had at last begun to enjoy economic prosperity there was no sense in antagonizing the Muslims. He concluded by saying that his government was interested in prolonging the present tranquility 'so that they could enjoy the football games'. When Yegar reminded him that Israel could provide substantial technical help to his country, al-Ghazali responded by saying that Malaya was capable of obtaining all its needs in men and matériel elsewhere. He told Yegar that the ruling Alliance coalition of the Malay, Chinese and Indian parties—MIC, MCA and United Malays National Organization Party (UMNO)—was not likely to change its policy toward Israel.

Yegar's repeated arguments regarding the usefulness of diplomatic ties did little to convince al-Ghazali, who remained skeptical and stated clearly that his government would maintain only cultural ties with Israel.¹⁸ However, unwilling to be regarded as ungrateful for Israel's favorable vote during its quest for admission to the United Nations

the Malayan government decided to grant Israel recognition. Muslim opposition to that move was immediate and furious, seeking to pass a motion in the Parliament withdrawing that recognition. Opposition to Israel came not only from Muslims but also from Malays who associated their experience with British rule with the Palestinians' experience with Israeli rule. Many of those who had resisted British rule in Malaya during the years 1948–57 associated British imperialism with Zionism. Moreover, Great Britain's repressive measures in Malaya magnified the perception that there was a close connection between British imperialism and Zionism. The fact that British officials such as High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney and Police Commissioner Colonel W.N.Gray were transferred to Malaya after serving in Palestine, where they were involved in counter-insurgency activities, was resented by the Malays.¹⁹ Many regarded the British as supporters of the Zionist enterprise and the oppressors of the Palestinian Arabs. This was an image that the opponents of Israel capitalized on in order to intensify the opposition to the act of recognition.

The decision to recognize Israel also triggered immediate criticism from the Arab world. Consequently, Malayan officials deemed it necessary to reassure the Arabs that the recognition was merely a formal step and that there was no intention to establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.²⁰ Pressure to withdraw that recognition began in earnest by late 1960. However, the Malayan Parliament discussed the PMIP's proposal to withdraw that recognition and rejected it outright.²¹ The decision not to withdraw Malay recognition was received with great satisfaction in Jerusalem and the Israeli Ambassador expressed gratitude to his Malayan counterpart.²² Nevertheless the PMIP continued to oppose Israel's recognition and pressured the Tunku to withdraw it. The Tunku's response was that the recognition was merely a routine step and that he had no intention of exchanging diplomatic representatives or upgrading the relations with Israel in any way.²³ When Zulkiflee bin Muhammad, who was the second most powerful figure in the PMIP, raised the recognition issue the Tunku again defended his government's decision, arguing that there was no justification for withdrawing it. He even went to the extent of saying that Malaya had nothing in common with the Arab states, except for religion. Moreover, he argued that Malaya did not ask for Arab help in its fight against the communists, thereby implying that they had no right to ask Malaya to support them in their campaign against Israel. He added that Israel supported Malaya's candidacy to the United Nations and that the only token of appreciation that Malaya could give Israel was by granting it recognition. Hoping to silence his Muslim critics he reiterated that Malaya did not have diplomatic relations with Israel and did not even invite its football team to play in Malaya.

In an effort to help the Tunku prevail over the opposition, Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman, the Minister of Domestic Security, argued that the Tunku would be willing to act as a mediator in the ArabIsraeli conflict as he did in the conflict over West Irian. In addition, Onn Jaafar, the only representative of the small Parti Negara (National Party, PN), whose objective was to promote Malay rights, voted against the decision to withdraw Malaya's recognition. What further helped the Tunku resist the opposition was the media's support. Immediately after the debate the press published the content of the Parliament's debate regarding the issue of recognition. According to one newspaper the Tunku argued that his country had proved its sympathy to the Arab states by not

establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. He said, however, that Malaya should not boycott Israel just because the Arabs did because 'if we have to follow in their step in everything we do, we might as well join the Arab League'.²⁴

The Tunku continued to express sympathy toward Israel and in his meeting with Yegar he stated that he disliked the Arabs. However, he asked Yegar to understand his predicament and to keep all his contacts with Malaya low-profile.²⁵ In an effort to continue the dialogue, Yegar suggested to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem that they accept Narayanan's suggestion and penetrate Malaya 'through the cracks'. Thereupon, greater efforts were made by the Israeli Foreign Ministry to contact Malayan officials, distribute newsletters and books about the country and expand the economic and cultural activities.

In November 1961, the Tunku visited London where he met the Israeli Ambassador Arthur Lourie. The Tunku explained the difficulties involved in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. However, he said that he would welcome commercial contacts and suggested that Israel open a consulate in Singapore. Foreign Ministry officials thought in a similar vein. They continued in their efforts to open an Embassy in Singapore as the first step in their penetration into the region. Therefore, they exerted pressure on the Malayan government to allow Singapore to open an Israeli Embassy there.²⁶ The rationale behind that move was to enable Israel to penetrate Malaya indirectly while keeping a low profile. This idea was the brainchild of Shimoni who said in his letter to Golda Meir that since Singapore's relations with Israel were improving, Israel should exploit the opportunity to develop what he referred to as an 'Israel-Burma-Nepal Axis' and argued that it would be wise to include Singapore in such a scheme. According to which Shimoni said there were several advantages. First and foremost, it would enable Israel to penetrate Malaya, a country that was destined to fulfill a key role in the political affairs of South Asia. Second, its location between the neutral bloc and the states that connected it to the West was valuable, particularly since it had good relations with both and could therefore be useful for Israel. Third, since Malaya was part of the British Commonwealth it was possible to obtain British help in the effort to normalize relations. He added that since it was unlikely that Malaya would take the initiative, Israel should make the necessary efforts to establish an Embassy in Singapore and then penetrate Malaya.²⁷ As it turned out, however, Singapore was less than sanguine about the Israeli plan. Unwilling to antagonize Malaya, officials in Singapore asked Israel to withdraw its application to the British Foreign Office to open a consulate.²⁸ Not surprisingly, the response from Kuala Lumpur was discouraging as well. In June 1962, the British Foreign Office announced that Malaya was against the opening of an Embassy in Singapore.

On his visit to Cairo in the spring of 1961, the Tunku was compelled again to deny that his country had any intention of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.²⁹ The pressure on the Tunku came not only from the Arab states and the Muslim opposition but also from his own United Malays National Organization Party that participated in the coalition and over which he did not wish to lose control.³⁰ Consisting of Malayan, Chinese and Indian parties, the fragile coalition was in constant danger of collapse. Maintaining a distance from Israel was one of the ways for the Tunku to maintain control over the Muslims. Discouraged by the failure of their diplomatic efforts, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials concluded that the best way to promote relations between the two

countries was through practical work encompassing trade visits by experts and a renewed attempt to open a general consulate in Singapore. Direct pressure on the Tunku was ruled out as an impractical solution.³¹

The establishment of Malaysia in September 1963 encouraged the Israeli Foreign Ministry to embark on a new diplomatic campaign. The rationale behind this decision was that this was an opportune moment and that the newly created state would get accustomed to an Israeli presence in Kuala Lumpur. However, by then approaching Malaysia had become even more difficult than it had been in the past. This was largely because Nasser remained strictly neutral in Malaysia's conflict with Indonesia and maintained full diplomatic relations with Kuala Lumpur without alienating Sukarno. Now that the opening of an Embassy in Singapore was no longer a realistic possibility and an overt diplomatic approach was not likely to succeed, a new approach had to be devised that would allow Israel to penetrate Malaysia 'through the cracks'. Therefore, the Israeli Foreign Ministry began operating through Estrako, an Israeli firm that operated in Singapore and opened a branch in Kuala Lumpur. The company was renamed Interasia and Yegar volunteered to become its director. At the same time Israeli contacts through Malaysian officials in all capacities continued unabated. When the President of the Malaysian Football Union Lim Kee Siong arrived in Israel in May 1964, he met Foreign Minister Golda Meir, who took the opportunity to discuss the status of the bilateral relations and told the Malaysian guest that she could not understand the Tunku's attitude toward Israel. She asked Siong to inform the Tunku that Israel was keenly interested in establishing full diplomatic relations with Malaysia. She added, however, that if the Tunku had any problem with such relations Israel would be willing to accept a gradual normalization. Meanwhile, she suggested that the Malaysian government take advantage of Israel's technical know-how, send students to study in its technical schools and exchange experts in all fields.³² Asked to explain his government's position, the Secretary General of the Malaysian Foreign Ministry Zaitun Ibrahim, who visited Israel's Ambassador in Bangkok Yehiel Ilisar on 18 July 1964, said that the Tunku would have liked to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel but he was compelled to consider the pressure exerted by Muslims not only in the opposition but also within his party. When the Tunku visited New York in August of that year he explained that Malaysia was in no position to antagonize the Muslim world by warming to Israel. He emphasized, however, that despite the lack of diplomatic relations his country remained friendly to Israel.

Another key official whom Yegar tried to approach was Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Dato Abdul Razek bin Hussein, the second most powerful man in Malaysia and the Tunku's confidant and successor. However, the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not seem to respond with alacrity to Yegar's recommendation to establish contact with Abdul Razek. Another suggestion raised by Yegar—that Israel should find the opportunity to denounce Indonesia and defend Malaysia in the United Nations—was rejected outright.

Israel's rapprochement with Singapore constituted an additional stumbling block in the attempt to approach Malaysia. When Israel agreed to assist Singapore in training its armed forces, the PMIP denounced Israel for upsetting the stability in South-East Asia. In November 1964, PMIP leader Asri bin Hagi called the attention of the Parliament to the

fact that the PAP regime in Singapore had become friendly to Israel. He argued that Singapore's policy was detrimental to the Arab states and therefore should not be tolerated. Asri informed the Parliament that Israeli experts came to Singapore in order to train Singaporean youth and that 22 Singaporean students were about to be sent to Israel for study. Asri wondered why Singapore chose Israel to be its guide and mentor, although his attitude was not common to all opposition members. In answer to Asri's comments, D.R. Seenivasagam of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) opposition party argued that Malaysia had no right to interfere in Singapore's internal affairs and blamed Asri for causing ethnic strife. The House Speaker accepted Seenivasagam's response and dismissed Asri's remarks.

There were two journalistic versions regarding the Tunku's response to those who criticized his Israeli policy. According to the one mentioned in the *Straits Times* the Tunku told the parliamentary members that Malaysia had no intention of recognizing Israel but added, 'we are not enemies'.³³ Yegar heard another version from a journalist who was present at that session. According to the second version, the Tunku said, 'Israel was in the UN before Malaya and therefore the issue of recognition did not exist. We do not have diplomatic relations with it and not even sport relations, however, we are not enemies.' If the *Straits Times's* version was reliable, this was the first time that the Tunku said that he did not recognize Israel. The second version was similar to several other statements that he had made in the past.³⁴

The issue re-emerged in the Parliament on 16 December 1964, when a PMIP member expressed resentment over the fact that Israeli scholars were invited to lecture at the University of Malaya. He argued that inviting Israeli experts and scholars would have an adverse effect on Malaysia's relations with the Afro-Asian world. He also demanded that Israel's propaganda in Malaysia cease immediately. The Tunku's response was that Malaysia had no ties with Israel and that its representatives were not invited to take part in seminars conducted there. He further argued that his government could not deny entry to Israelis who wish to participate in UN-sponsored meetings because Israel was a UN member. However, he said that Malaysia would not invite Israelis to take part in meetings organized by the government. He added that the Israeli team had not been allowed to participate in the Merdeka tournament in the previous year and tried to portray a pro-Arab image by saying that his government had always sent aid to the Palestinian refugees. He concluded by warning the opposition not to spread rumors regarding the government's ties with Israel because this might lead to 'misunderstanding between Malaysia and the Arab world'.³⁵ The Tunku's response did little to allay the suspicion of the opposition whose spokesmen continued to attack the government for its contacts with Israel. On the same day, a PMIP representative blamed the Deputy Minister of Culture for maintaining exchange programs with Israeli youth.

Israel's failure to reach Malaysia was due not only to lack of effort on the part of its Foreign Ministry officials but also to problems inherent in Malaysia's ethnic composition. The tension between the Malays and the Chinese on the one hand, and the central government and the PAP opposition in Singapore on the other, made it increasingly difficult to normalize relations with Israel. This tension intensified following the establishment of the Malaysian federation. The need for reconciliation between the UNMO and the PMIP forced the government to maintain a distance from Israel. In order

to pacify the opposition, Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Razek reached an agreement with the PMIP, whose leaders were in control of Kelantan. His commitment to extend financial aid to that state led to better understanding between the government and the PMIP. The fact that both parties were hostile to the Chinese and despised the PAP made it even more difficult for Israel to establish stronger ties with Malaysia since both Malaysian parties disapproved of the Israeli-Singaporean connection.

The PMIP had consistently utilized the Israeli card in an attempt to embarrass Lee as well as the Tunku. Therefore, in order to remain on good terms with the Muslim public in Malaysia, the Tunku was forced to deny any contact with Israel or any intention of having contact in the future. Israel's involvement in training the Singaporean armed forces was particularly infuriating to all Muslim groups.³⁶ In addition, the Arabs continued to exert pressure on Malaysia to sever its ties with Israel. For example, the Saudi Ambassador demanded that all trade connections with Israel be severed. The most active, however, was the Egyptian Embassy, which constantly tried to prevent the Malaysian government from inviting Israeli officials. Moreover, the Egyptian Embassy provided financial support to the PMIP in order to increase what it termed the 'Muslim consciousness'. The Indonesian government was involved in a similar activity in order to increase the tension between Chinese and Malays. The fact that the Malaysian government sought Arab support against Indonesia in the Afro-Asian conference scheduled to take place in Algiers in 1965, further diminished the prospects of better relations with Israel.

Despite Malaysia's reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, trade between the two countries expanded to 15 million Malayan dollars in 1964. Of all ethnic groups in Malaysia the most open to Israeli overtures were the Indians, but these had little power or influence. The Malaysians remained the most influential in the government. However, fearing hostility from the PMIP they remained overtly unfriendly to Israel. As for the Tunku, he continued to meet with Israeli representatives but repeatedly asked that these talks remain secret. As the Tunku saw it, the real threat came not from the Arabs, but from the domestic Muslim opposition and from opponents within his party.

By the beginning of 1965, the Tunku came under enormous pressure that he sought to alleviate. The issue of Israel's recognition re-emerged when one MP, Enche Abu Baker bin Hamza, asked the Prime Minister to withdraw the recognition. The Tunku's response was that the Malaysian government recognized the Israeli state but not its government. He added that as long as the Alliance coalition remained in power, Malaysia would not recognize the Israeli government. Moreover, he said that he had no intention whatsoever of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel and that Malaysia would not invite Israelis to participate in cultural or social events.³⁷ The pressure within the Tunku's party to keep Israel at a distance mounted considerably in the months that followed. The UMNO's Secretary General asked the Tunku to exert his influence in order to keep Israel away from Singapore. The Secretary General hoped that by doing so the UMNO could weaken the PMIP opposition and thus portray itself as no less Muslim than its rival. Moreover, the UMNO sought to benefit from the Arab markets and therefore promoted friendship with the Arab countries by capitalizing on the anti-Israeli sentiment within the party. Besides, the Secretary General and some of his supporters were staunch nationalist Malaysians who did not approve of the Tunku's liberal policy in many areas, including the

ties with Israel. The pressure on the Tunku was so intense that he was compelled to deny any dealings with Israel. When criticized by the PMIP for maintaining cultural ties with Israel he denied that Malaysia had anything to do with it. He said, 'The Government has never had a hand in allowing Israeli representatives to attend seminars here. The few who have come have been chosen by the United Nations, of which Israel is a member.'³⁸ When bin Hamzah asked the Tunku what steps would be taken to reconsider the Malaysian recognition of Israel he responded by saying that 'Malaysia's recognition of Israel will remain permanently as recognition of the Israel country but not of the Israel government'. He went on to say that Malaysia had no intention of recognizing Israel as long as the Labor Alignment remained in power and that his government was not planning to establish diplomatic or any relations with Israel. Moreover, he explained that the recognition which his government did grant Israel stemmed from its respect for the United Nations and its Charter.³⁹

By late May 1965, there were clear signs that the Malaysian government had decided to limit its contacts with Israel. At the same time aggressive steps were taken to expand Malaysia's ties with the Arab world. The King and other Malaysian diplomats visited Muslim countries. News about the warm reception that the King received in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and Jordan was proudly published in the Malaysian press.⁴⁰ And when Malaysia's Ambassador to Egypt, Enche Ya'coub bin Abdul Latiff presented his credentials to Nasser he expressed sympathy for Egypt's leading role in the Nonalignment Movement.⁴¹ Diplomatic missions were opened in Morocco in 1965, and a year later the Malaysian envoy in Cairo was accredited to Sudan and Lebanon. In addition, there was an exchange of representatives with Iran.⁴²

These developments discouraged the Israelis and significantly reduced the diplomatic momentum. The signs that Malaysia was bent on distancing itself from Israel became more obvious in the second half of 1965. A visit by Professor Ungku Abdul Aziz, head of the economics department at the University of Malaya, to a conference in the Weizmann Institute was canceled. The Chairman of the National Center for Productivity told Yegar that he was compelled to cancel the study project of one of his men in Israel who obtained a scholarship from the International Labor Organization and to send him to Oslo instead.⁴³ The debates in the Malaysian Parliament became stormier as the summer approached. On 1 June 1965, a UMNO Minister, Ali bin Haji lashed out at the Singaporean government for employing Israeli experts and some of the party's members called Lee a 'traitor'.⁴⁴ Even the fact that Malaysia's efforts to obtain Arab support for the coming meeting in Algiers failed did not change Kuala Lumpur's attitude toward Israel.⁴⁵

On 1 September 1965 Yegar met Jacques de Silva and Muhammad bin Harun, from the Malaysian Foreign Ministry, who informed him that none of the ministry's officials was in a position to change the government's attitude toward Israel due to pressure exerted by a group of religious Muslim politicians loyal to the Arab states and to Egypt in particular. They added that the government instructed the Foreign Ministry not to encourage visits by Israeli dignitaries. Moreover, they stated that they would prefer to provide visas on a single document rather than on the Israeli passport just as they had done in the case of Taiwan. The reason given for this new policy was that they recognized the State of Israel but not its government.⁴⁶

By the end of September 1965 Yegar learned that the Malaysian government had withdrawn its recognition from Israel. The announcement regarding this matter appeared in a publication by the Malaysian Information Department. The publication, which contained a list of all countries not recognized by Malaysia, mentioned 'The Israeli Government' rather than 'The State of Israel'. Only the Muslim radicals and the Arab states seemed to have been informed of that decision. By November of that year, further draconian steps against Israel were taken. The government decided not to send journalists to study in Israel. By late November members of the PMIP in the Parliament intensified their assaults. The Tunku responded that although his government recognized the fact that there was a state called Israel and that it was a UN member, Malaysia had no business whatsoever with its government. He also said that all Israeli representatives had been told to leave the country. This was a clear indication to Yegar that his presence was no longer desired and several days later he departed for Israel. According to Malaysian government sources Yegar was suspected of interfering in the country's affairs and of causing tension between Malaysia and the Arab states. Yegar's detractors argued that he had access to the Malaysian national archives where he read sensitive documents.⁴⁷ The Tunku was reported to have said that 'Mr Yegar has been nasty and we were put in a very bad position.' This incident enraged the Tunku, who decided to restrict mutual visits and to declare Yegar *persona non grata*.⁴⁸

The anti-Israeli mood which prevailed in Malaysia by the end of 1965 led to further restrictions against contacts with Israel. On 21 December 1965, Senator Aisha Ghani demanded a complete ban on travel to Israel. The IDF's invasion of the Jordanian village of Samoat on 13 November 1966 was a further blow to the bilateral relations. The statement made by the Malaysian Foreign Ministry criticized Israel for its aggression. It read as follows:

This deliberate act of aggression freely admitted by the Israeli authorities, in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Jordan, is contrary to all accepted principles of International Law and the Charter of the United Nations and can only aggravate tension in the area and threaten international peace and security.⁴⁹

Summarizing his experience, Yegar argued that the Malaysian government was not moved by hostility toward Israel and that its decision to sever its diplomatic ties with the Jewish state was determined by practical, political considerations. The Malaysian government severed its ties with Israel but at the same time did not wish to antagonize the Israeli government, whose connections with the United States and other Western countries it valued considerably. As officials in Kuala Lumpur saw it, Israel was in a position to tarnish Malaysia's image in these countries. Yegar's major argument was that Israel's failure in Malaysia was largely due to neglect by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Malaysia, he argued, had not loomed large on Israel's foreign policy agenda ever since Sharett's visit to the country in 1956. It was only by the end of 1964 that Israel began showing any real interest in that country and by then it was too late. Malaysia, whose objective was to be admitted to the conference in Algiers, was ready to pay the 'Israeli' price in order to obtain Arab support. Numerous times Yegar appealed to the Israeli

Foreign Ministry to arrange meetings with Malaysian officials and to use other countries in order to reach Kuala Lumpur. However, what was done was too little, too late.⁵⁰

The anti-Israeli stand of the Malaysian government continued unabated in the years that followed, particularly following the Six Day War. Malaysia's representatives in the United Nations continuously voted for anti-Israeli resolutions. They demanded Israeli withdrawal from all Arab-occupied territories and the restoration of Palestinian rights. Tan Chee Khoo was one of the very few MPs who made reference to the bias that existed in Malaysia's policy toward the Middle East. In a speech to the Malaysian Parliament he said:

There is one by-product of the Middle East War that I wish to comment on. I refer to the news coverage of both T.V. Malaysia and Radio Malaysia on the War there. News reporting should be both factually objective, and impartial. Comments however can be slanted to one's needs. In this Radio Malaysia failed dismally, so much so that most of us had to tune into Radio Singapore or the B.B.C. or Radio Australia to find out what was going on in the Middle East. T.V. Malaysia was only slightly better.⁵¹

The tendency to support the Arabs intensified considerably when the Tunku resigned in 1971 and Abdul Razek took office. Dato Hussein bin Onn, who became Prime Minister in 1974, continued that trend. The official announcements of the Malaysian government were highly critical of Israel. For example, on 23 June 1974, Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen al-Haj bin Tengku Ismail, Minister of Information and Special Functions and leader of the Malaysian delegation at the Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur, said:

We are glad that Arab solidarity contributed, in no small measure, to the resounding Arab success in the Ramadan War and we look forward to the vacation of aggression by Israel and full restitution for every act of aggression that Israel has perpetrated against our Arab brethren. We look forward to the return of Baitul-Maqdis to the control of the Arab nation so that the sanctity of the Holy shrines in that city, be they Muslim, Christian or Judaist veneration, may continue to be preserved in the spirit in which they were safeguarded during many centuries of Arab patrimony before ore Israel launched her policy of aggression. We look forward to the full restoration of the national rights of the Palestinian people who have been deprived of their rightful homeland by Israeli aggression, aided and abetted by supporters of Zionism.⁵²

At the 29th Session of the General Assembly held in September 1974, Tan Sri Hajj Sardon bin Haji Jubir, Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN, said,

A just and durable peace in the Middle East will only emerge with the return of the illegally occupied territories, territories acquired by force, to the countries to which they legally belong, the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland, and equally important the end of Israeli occupation of the Holy City of Jerusalem.⁵³

Indonesia's prominent role in the Nonalignment Movement left Malaysia in a position of inferiority and one of the methods which it used in order to enhance its position in that movement was by beating the anti-Israel drum. At a meeting of the nonaligned nations held in Havana on 18 March 1975, Rithaudeen argued that Israel was the main stumbling block to peace in the Middle East and criticized its refusal to negotiate with the PLO. He expressed sympathy not only for plight of the Palestinians but also for their terrorist methods by saying that 'It is hardly surprising that the Palestinians began to retaliate in the only way they could to draw attention to their plight.' He concluded by saying,

If Israel wants to be remembered in history for her recalcitrance, her aggression and her inhumanity, we, as part of the non-aligned group, would like to be remembered as having taken part in a just attempt to consolidate the strength of the Palestinians, so that they can play their rightful role in the negotiations for their own destiny.⁵⁴

This was also one of the reasons why Malaysia joined the nonaligned countries in supporting the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism and racism. In another speech which he delivered in his capacity as Foreign Minister and leader of the Malaysian delegation in the nonaligned nations' meeting in Algiers on 30 May 1976, Rithaudeen said, 'We are happy to see that the recognition of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians is no longer in doubt, and the UN General Assembly itself has called for the participation of the PLO on an equal footing with all parties on all peace efforts on the Middle East question.'⁵⁵

Harsher anti-Israel statements were yet to come. On 17 November 1976, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Y.B.Tuan Haji Zakaria bin Haji Abdul Rahman told the General Assembly that Israel's repressive policy resulted in a human tragedy and in the desecration of shrines holy to the Muslim faith.⁵⁶ Such statements placed Malaysia at the forefront of the Nonalignment Movement and enabled its government to appear as an altruistic champion of the movements for national liberation. This explains why the Malaysian government did not lose any opportunity to demonstrate its intense commitment to the Palestinian cause. On 19 November 1976, H.E.Tan Sri Zaiton Ibrahim bin Ahmad, the Permanent Representative of Malaysia in the General Assembly stated, 'My delegation derives great satisfaction from the knowledge that the Palestinian problem has recently been elevated to a new level of urgency it rightly deserves.'⁵⁷ Similar statements were made at the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, which held its session in Tripoli in May 1977, and at the General Assembly on 29 November 1978.⁵⁸ When Iraq's Foreign Minister Sadoun Hammadi visited Rithaudeen in Kuala Lumpur in February 1979, both condemned Israel and stated that the Palestinian issue was at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁵⁹

The Malaysian government's obsession with the Palestinian cause led it to identify with their predicament in other ways. On 21 August 1979, Rithaudeen announced his government's decision to observe al-Aqsa day 'to remind all Muslims and other peace-loving people of the tragedy that has befallen the Holy City of Baitul Muqaddis and its holy shrines since its illegal occupation by Israel in 1967'.⁶⁰ However, Malaysia's expressions of solidarity for the Palestinian cause were mainly verbal and lacked much

substance.⁶¹ Despite its official pronouncements and its refusal to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, the Malaysian government proved far more pragmatic than its official statements suggest. Malaysian officials told their Israeli counterparts that they greatly appreciated Israel's superb technology and expressed interest in purchasing arms. According to Aaron Klieman, in 1979 Israel supplied Malaysia with 65 Skyhawk, Mirage aircraft and Gabriel missiles.⁶² These purchases were not made public and the official statements that emanated from Kuala Lumpur continued to be critical. The Malaysian government found that its anti-Israeli rhetoric earned it handsome dividends both in the Arab world and in the Nonalignment Movement. In a debate over the Palestine issue on 28 July 1980, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Mokhtar Hashim lashed out at Israel for moving the Prime Minister's office to Jerusalem. Implying that the United States was responsible for Israel's behavior he said, 'It was the attitude of the major powers and the success of their manipulations that had enabled Israel to continue to pursue their illegal policies in the occupied territories.'⁶³

Another turning point in Malaysia's policy toward Israel occurred in 1981, when Dato Mahatir bin Muhammad became Prime Minister. Mahatir turned out to be a radical Muslim whose anti-Israeli campaign manifested itself on numerous occasions. His view on the Palestine question was that 'the whole country was simply taken from the Arabs and handed over to the Jews'.⁶⁴ The formal statements made by Malaysian officials during his incumbency continued to be harsh and even intensified. They were highly critical of Israel's attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak in 1981; and when Israel decided to annex the Golan Heights, Foreign Minister Shafie said that the Israeli action was 'part and parcel of its policy of systematic acts of aggression, terrorism and expansionism'.⁶⁵ On 15 March 1983, Shafie had sharply criticized Begin's government for repressive measures against the Palestinians and for encouraging Jewish extremist groups to occupy the holy Muslim shrines.⁶⁶ Malaysia's criticism of Israel reached new heights after the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in September 1982. The official statement of the Malaysian government said that 'It is a crime equaled only by the horrendous Nazi atrocities,' and Foreign Ministry officials called upon the United States to reassess its policy toward Israel.⁶⁷

At the opening of the Asian Conference on the Question of Palestine, which took place in Kuala Lumpur on 3 May 1983, Mahatir said that the Palestinians were harassed, suffering and humiliated by Israel's repressive measures,⁶⁸ and in a speech to the Foreign Policy Association in Washington on 19 July 1984 he asked, 'Must the Palestinian people who for decades now have known nothing but bullets, fear and desperation continue to pay the price for Adolf Hitler's tyranny?' His remarks were clearly critical of US support for Israel. He told his listeners, 'As a friend of the United States, I say with all regret that your refusal to acknowledge the basic rights of the Palestinian people greatly diminishes your credibility world-wide.'⁶⁹

Mahatir's hostility toward Israel manifested itself in numerous other ways. He did much to promote his country's relations with Iran and identified with its anti-Israeli statements. Moreover, he declared that Malaysia would never make peace with Israel even if the Arabs did. Mahatir's government became not only anti-Israeli but also anti-Jewish. In 1984, the Malaysian government canceled the performance of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra because its directorship refused the demand of the Malaysian

Information Minister to eliminate from the program the *Hebrew Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra* by the Jewish composer Ernest Bloch. On 12 August 1986, Mahatir delivered a speech in a journalists' club in Malaysia in which he stated that the Jews controlled the media. On other occasions he told audiences that Jewish journalists were attempting to cause instability in Malaysia with their distorted reports.

More hostile anti-Semitic remarks were yet to come. In a speech delivered at a meeting of the nonaligned nations in Zimbabwe in September 1986, Mahatir said that the exile of the Jews from Palestine and their persecution by the Nazis did not teach them a lesson but made them resemble the monsters that they condemn in their propaganda. He added that the Jews had turned into adept disciples of Goebbels. On October 1986, Mahatir said that his government was concerned about Zionist attempts to harm Malaysia and its economy and when President Herzog visited Singapore in November 1986, he called for cutting its water supplies. Moreover, the Malaysian government recalled its ambassador from that country and was on the verge of severing diplomatic relations with it. In a statement to the General Assembly on 13 December 1988, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dato Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan praised the Intifada as a heroic struggle and denounced the 'unrelenting savagery' used by Israel against the Palestinians. He added that Malaysia was delighted to welcome the declaration of the establishment of the State of Palestine made by the Palestine National Council on 15 November 1988.⁷⁰ In another statement at the Security Council on 8 June 1989, the Permanent Representative to the United Nations said, 'We can catalogue the litany of aggression, violation of conventions, application of acts of terror and deprivation, base desecration and now rearing its ugly head, racism.'⁷¹ When the United States decided to suspend its dialogue with the PLO, Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar stated that this was a setback to the peace process and called on Washington to resume the dialogue.⁷² Mahatir raised the issue of Palestinian rights again during the Gulf crisis and called on the United States to adopt an even-handed approach to Middle East problems.⁷³ In a meeting of the OIC the Malaysian representative said that his government opposed Israel's policy of absorbing Soviet Jews in order to establish 'Greater Israel'.⁷⁴ The anti-Israeli campaign continued unabated in speeches delivered by Malaysian representatives in the General Assembly.⁷⁵

In April 1991 Mustafa Ya'acub, the Secretary General of the International Division of the young generation of the UMNO, accused the Australian Zionist movement of conducting an anti-Malaysian campaign and blamed them for an attempt to overthrow Mahatir's government. The hostility continued unabated and even the fact that Israel established diplomatic relations with India and China did not impress Mahatir. By October 1992, Malaysia refused to allow an El Al representative to attend an international aviation conference scheduled to take place in Kuala Lumpur in December of that year. In addition, Malaysia refused to allow an Israeli footballer who played in the Liverpool team to enter the country and the team canceled its visit. In March 1994, Mahatir went as far as banning the movie *Schindler's List* after dismissing it as a piece of Jewish propaganda.

What seemed to be a sudden breakthrough that astonished many observers occurred in June 1994, when the brother of the Malaysian King, Tenku Abdullah Abdul Rahman was reported to have met Rabin and Peres in Israel. Such a radical departure from Malaysia's hostile attitude toward Israel could not take place without causing uproar among the

Muslims in that country, and pressure could be expected from the radical Arab countries as well. Therefore, the Malaysian government found it necessary to dampen the effect of that visit by stating that upon his return Abdullah would be punished for violating a law prohibiting visits to Israel.⁷⁶

Abdullah's visit to Israel was the first by a high-level Malaysian official. Despite the angry response from Muslim quarters the visit was reported to have been a 'political breakthrough' which could lead to an agreement 'in principle' to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. Mahatir remained passionately pro-Arab and an enthusiastic champion of the Palestinian cause. Nevertheless, Malaysian visitors began entering Israel with the knowledge of the Malaysian government. Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry remained confident that the Malaysian government was about to reach a decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.⁷⁷ Press reports stated that since the conclusion of the autonomy accord with the Palestinians, the Malaysian government had changed its attitude toward Israel. However, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office declined to confirm or deny the report.⁷⁸ Israeli officials stated that better relations with Kuala Lumpur were contingent upon progress in the Middle East peace process and added that the establishment of diplomatic relations would be economically beneficial for Israel.⁷⁹

Malaysia's change of policy seemed so sudden that it left observers puzzled. Shortly after the visit, Mahatir told a Malay newspaper that his country was considering establishing diplomatic relations with Israel because other Arab countries had begun to do so.⁸⁰ However, the Malaysian government was careful not to anger Arab public opinion. In November 1994, it called upon Israel to cooperate with UNRWA by ceasing all repressive measures against the Palestinians such as the closure of schools and other training facilities in the occupied territories. Malaysia's Ambassador to Senegal Lily Zachariah said in the General Assembly that her country was concerned about the disruption in education, which resulted from the turmoil in the occupied territories. Zachariah argued that, in her government's view, Palestinians should not be denied their basic human right of education. She added that Israel should abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, requiring cooperation with UNRWA and respect for its regulations.⁸¹

There were other signs that Malaysia's hostility had abated somewhat. In November 1994, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that all Malaysians, Muslim and non-Muslim with a valid passport would be able to go to Jerusalem for religious purposes but while there they would be subject to Israeli law. However, fearing criticism from Muslim elements, Immigration Department Public Relations Officer Aris Chonin said explicitly that this move did not mean that the Malaysian government had established diplomatic relations with Israel. He added that entry to Israel remained restricted and those going beyond Jerusalem could have their passports impounded.⁸²

Despite critical remarks made by its officials in international fora, the Malaysian government had shown clear signs that its attitude toward Israel was slowly changing. The criticism and insults of Jews characteristic of former years were no longer heard. Malaysia reacted to Rabin's murder by expressing deep sorrow. Mahatir said:

It is true that we do not have relations with Israel; however, we think that Rabin's role in the peace process was indispensable and he paid very heavily for

it. In fact, the majority of the Arab world desires peace, but the radicals would do whatever they can to put a spoke in the wheels in order to prevent the achievement of peace.⁸³

Warming up to Israel continued to present a difficult problem for Mahatir, who was under tremendous pressure from the nonaligned countries whose representatives attended the 12th nonaligned conference in New Delhi in the spring of 1997, in which they condemned Israel's policy in the occupied territories.⁸⁴ Commenting on the turmoil in Gaza and the West Bank, the participating members 'reaffirmed their full support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to secure their inalienable rights to self-determination and independence and reiterated their demand for the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and other Arab land, including Jerusalem'.⁸⁵ In addition, they adopted a unanimous decision protesting against the Israeli government's decision to expand its settlements in East Jerusalem. Foreign Minister Badawi explained the decision saying:

The meeting sought to ask all member countries to freeze relations with Israel to protest the planned go-ahead of a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. We hope the decision will give a strong message to Israel that NAM, which represents two-thirds of the United Nations is opposed to their plan which is jeopardizing the Middle East peace process. I remind the meeting that Malaysia's stand is that we should not procrastinate on the issue since all member countries are in favor of the Security Council's reformation. However, the NAM Foreign Ministers' meeting decided that reformation based on proposals presented by UN General Assembly president Tan Sri Razli Ismail in New York should be looked at closely before any decision is made.⁸⁶

While considering the issue of diplomatic relations, Mahatir continued to cultivate relations with the Arab states. Malaysia's relations with Algeria improved considerably after Badawi visited the country in the autumn of 1994.⁸⁷ His trip to the Gulf countries in the spring of 1997 was meant to convey to the Arabs the message that normalization with Israel did not necessarily imply the weakening of his country's ties with them.⁸⁸ The Malaysian media hailed his trip to Kuwait and Bahrain as a spectacular success.⁸⁹ At the same time, Mahatir said that 'Malaysia views Egypt as the ideal trading partner and an excellent channel for reaching other Arab and African states.' He added that his government had decided to explore trade and investment opportunities there.⁹⁰ Shortly afterwards, Malaysia and Egypt signed three agreements and two memoranda of understanding on trade and tourism.⁹¹ In his meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Kemal Ahmed El-Ganzoury, Mahatir stated that his country shared Egypt's view on the need for the Middle East peace process to move forward.⁹²

The pressure on Mahatir's government to avoid normalization with Israel continued unabated. Resistance came particularly from Muslim-dominated states within the Malaysian federation. The resistance was particularly intense in Kelantan, the only Malaysian state that was not controlled by Mahatir's party but by the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). When Israel sent a team to take part in the 22-nation cricket tournament in the spring of 1997, several hundred students demonstrated. The state of Kelantan was

behind that demonstration. Mahatir demonstrated a remarkably pragmatic approach when he condemned the demonstration and called the protesters 'stupid'.⁹³ The demonstrators hurled stones and the police responded by firing tear-gas canisters and spraying chemical irritants; about 250 protesters were arrested.⁹⁴

That the bilateral relations could not improve as quickly as officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry hoped was due not only to the slow process of the peace process but also to Mahatir's Islamic convictions. Under Mahatir, Islam assumed a growing importance and therefore had considerable impact on the country's foreign relations. Although Islam had played an important role under his predecessors, it assumed greater importance when he came to power. After 1971 he regularly attended the meetings of the OIC. At a meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1992, he spoke as Asia's representative, and told the members that only Islamic practices should be tolerated and that those incompatible with Islam should be discarded. He also supported the organizations associated with the OIC such as the Islamic Solidarity Fund, the Islamic Development Fund and others. In addition, he attended meetings held by other Islamic groups such as the Regional Islamic Council of South-East Asia and the Pacific. In all of these meetings he was the spokesman and the defender of Islam against those who criticized Islamic practices.⁹⁵

Mahatir's hostility toward Israel stemmed also from his negative attitude toward the United States, which he saw not only as supporting Israel against the Palestinians but also as an intransigent power interfering in his country's affairs by its presence in South-East Asia. He totally rejected the axiom that United States presence in South-East Asia was necessary for regional security in the post-Cold War world. However, by 1996 there was a shift in Malaysia's policy toward the United States. The Malaysian government allowed US ships to visit its ports and joint exercises took place.⁹⁶ This process contributed to a better attitude toward Israel but did not lead to normalization. Mahatir could not extricate himself from his anti-Jewish bias. His anti-Semitic tendencies became clear again in the autumn of 1997, when California legislators protested vigorously against his remarks that a Jewish conspiracy was responsible for weakening his regime. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials dismissed Mahatir's statement as unworthy of comment.⁹⁷ The fact that the Malaysian public was not ready for such a drastic change in attitude toward Israel, particularly when the issue of Jerusalem remained unresolved, complicated the normalization process—it was an issue on which they were particularly sensitive. For example, in 1997 members of the United Malays National Organization joined other organizations and individuals who protested against Israel's decision to declare Jerusalem as its capital.⁹⁸

Although there were clear signs that there was a change of heart in Kuala Lumpur, the failure of the peace process and the Intifada al-Aqsa delayed the normalization process considerably. The numerous statements made by Malaysian officials regarding the issue of normalization suggest clearly that the future of the bilateral relations would continue to depend on the pace of the Middle East peace process. Israel's success or failure in establishing diplomatic relations with other Muslim states such as Pakistan and Indonesia would undoubtedly affect Malaysia's course of action. Malaysia's awareness that Israel has access to Washington is likely to contribute to better relations. However, even if the government decides to establish diplomatic relations with Israel it would be unrealistic to expect all of Malaysia's Muslims to approve of their government's decision.

NOTES

1. The country became known as Malaysia after Sarawak, Singapore and Sabah joined in September 1963.
2. Sharett, *Personal Diary*, Vol. 6, p. 1,711.
3. Sharett recalled in his memoirs that he was astonished to hear the Tunku say, 'I cannot believe that the Arabs can ever be human!' *Ibid.*, p. 1,766.
4. Ben Horin to Foreign Ministry, ISA 2561/5, 21 October 1956; Sharett, *Traveling in Asia* (Tel Aviv: Ahdut, 1957), pp. 105, 109 [Hebrew].
5. Cited in G.P.Bhattacharjee, *Southeast Asian Politics: Malaysia and Indonesia* (Calcutta: South Asia Books, 1977), p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
7. Malaysia followed the lead of all nonaligned countries which condemned the US invasion of Lebanon in 1958. James W.Gould, *The United States and Malaysia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 216.
8. Bhattacharjee, *Southeast Asian Politics*, p. 99.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Peter Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy: Documents and Commentaries* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 175.
11. The PMIP emphasized the importance of Malay nationalism and advocated a theocratic state based on Islamic principles. K.J.Ratnam, 'Political Parties and Pressure Groups', in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Malaysia: A Survey* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), p. 336; for a detailed discussion of the issues that concerned the Muslim groups see T.N.Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 334–40.
12. Moshe Yegar, *Malaysia—Attempts at Dialogue with a Muslim Country* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), p. 18 [Hebrew].
13. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
14. Tunku Ismail Bin Tunku Yahya to Walter Eytan, ISA 3325/60, 20 June 1960.
15. Medzini, *The Proud Jewess*, pp. 284–5.
16. Foreign Ministry to Consul General in Los Angeles, ISA 3325/60, 30 September 1960.
17. Yegar to Foreign Ministry, ISA 3325/60, 15 August 1960.
18. Yegar, *Malaysia*, pp. 24–5.
19. Malcolm Caldwell, 'From Emergency to "Independence", 1948–1957', in Mohamed Amin and Malcolm Caldwell (eds), *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony* (London: Spokesman Books, 1977), p. 223.
20. *Falastin*, 23 January 1960.
21. *First House of Representatives Federation of Malaya: Second Session*. Order Paper, ISA 3325/60 14 September 1960; *Malay Mail*, 2 December 1960; *Straits Times*, 6 December 1960.
22. Kidron to Tuan Syed Sheh bin Syed Abdullah Shahabudin, ISA 3325/60, 15 December 1960.
23. Kidron to Shimoni, ISA 3325/60, 19 May 1960.

24. *Malay Mail*, 2 December 1960.
25. Yegar, *Malaysia*, pp. 29, 34.
26. Shimoni to Kidron, ISA 3325/67, 10 August 1961.
27. Shimoni to Meir, ISA 3334/6, 28 August 1960.
28. R.Kidron's briefing concerning the establishment of an Israeli consulate in Singapore, ISA 3334/6, 16 July 1961.
29. Radio Cairo in Hebrew, ISA 3325/60, 4 April 1961; *Ma'ariv*, 4 April 1961.
30. Ben Horin to Shimoni, ISA 3325/60, 8 June 1960.
31. Kidron to Shimoni, ISA 3325/60, 15 September 1960.
32. Yegar, *Malaysia*, p. 39.
33. *Straits Times*, 4 December 1964.
34. Yegar, *Malaysia*, p. 47.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
36. An Indian scholar who dealt with research on the political parties in Malaysia and often met the Secretary General of the UMNO told Yegar that he heard an angry comment about the Israeli-Singaporean connection. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
37. Metcalpe to Goodison, PRO FO 371, 180869, ER1061/3, 13 January 1965.
38. Martin to Redpath, PRO FO/371, 180869, ER1061/1, January 1965.
39. 'Written Question: Malaysia's Recognition of Israel', *Dewan Ra'ayat*, 25 November 1964, PRO FO/371, 180869, ER1061/1, 25 November 1964.
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42. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
43. Yegar, *Malaysia*, p. 110.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.
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46. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
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58. '8th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, May 16–23, 1977', *FAM*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1977), pp. 45–6; 'Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People', *FAM*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (December 1978), pp. 53–4.
59. 'Visit of the Iraqi Foreign Minister, February 7–10, 1979', *FAM*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (March 1979), p. 68.
60. 'Al-Aqsa Day, August 21, 1979', *FAM*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 1979), p. 343.
61. When asked what did his government do for the Palestinians other than expressing verbal support, Rithaudeen did not have much to say other than the fact that his government allowed the PLO to occupy an office in Kuala Lumpur free of charge and provided a car. He also mentioned the fact that his government issued special commemorative Palestine stamps the proceeds from which were to be donated to the families of the Palestinian martyrs. *FAM*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (December 1978), p. 156.
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65. 'Malaysia's Stand on the Israeli Annexation of the Golan Heights', *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (December 1981), p. 441.
66. 'Israeli New Acts of Repression Against the Palestinians', *FAM*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 1983), p. 87.
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78. *Kuwait Times*, 19 June 1994.
79. Jerusalem Israel Television Channel 1 in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-94-118, 20 June 1994; Algerian Radio in Arabic ME/2026MED/11, 20 June 1994.
80. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 August 1994.
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82. *New Straits Times*, 10 November 1994.
83. *Ha'aretz*, 7 November 1995.
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85. *Egyptian Gazette*, 7 April 1997.
86. *New Straits Times*, 11 April 1997.
87. *Straits Times*, 1 November 1994.
88. *Egyptian Gazette*, 8 April 1997.
89. *New Straits Times*, 7, 8, 10 April 1997.
90. *Ibid.*, 15 April 1997.
91. *Egyptian Gazette*, 15, 16 April 1997.
92. *New Straits Times*, 15 April 1997.
93. *The Economist*, 12 April 1997; *Jerusalem Post*, 20 April 1997.
94. *Jerusalem Post*, 6 April 1997.
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Part VI
The Caucasus and Central
Asia

Israel and the Great Game in Asia

The late 1980s and early 1990s brought an unprecedented triumph for Israel's Asia policy. Major breakthroughs were achieved in Israel's relations not only with the countries of the Middle East periphery but also with the most populous Asian states such as China and India. Smaller and less significant countries such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka saw benefit in establishing ties with Israel. Even Islamic states such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan were encouraged by the progress made in the Middle East peace negotiations and began considering the possibility of recognizing Israel.¹ It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the Asian states of the former Soviet Union saw no danger in responding to Israel's friendly overtures. Moreover, the implementation of the agreement with the Palestinians, along with Israel's consent to evacuate Hebron, had given further momentum to the normalization process. Above all, however, it was the collapse of the Soviet Union that provided Israel with a unique opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with the newly established republics of the Caucasus region (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) and those of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Israel's main efforts, however, were invested in the Muslim republics of Central Asia. Seen from Israel's viewpoint, this was a unique opportunity to shift the center of gravity of the Muslim world northward and thus change the balance of power in Israel's favor by marginalizing the importance of the Arab region of the Middle East.

A close look at the development of Israel's relations with these republics reveals that both sides were motivated by political and material gains and that ideological considerations never played a significant role in their considerations. Moreover, the frequently heard stipulation made by the leaders of these republics that normalization with Israel was contingent upon a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict was no more than lip service which they felt obliged to pay to the Arab states. Although these republics identified with the Arabs and their governments remained sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinian people it is abundantly clear that none of them regarded the solution to the Middle East conflict as a *sine qua non* for better relations with Israel. Undoubtedly, the Israeli-PLO accord, the formation of the autonomous Palestinian Authority and the long-awaited withdrawal of Israeli troops from the major cities of the occupied territories in the West Bank have all contributed to better understanding between Israel and these republics. However, despite their pro-Palestinian rhetoric these republics were quick to normalize relations with Israel even before the Palestinian autonomy plan was implemented. Moreover, these republics were so pragmatic that even the failure of the peace process and the outbreak of the violence in the West Bank and Gaza in the autumn of 2000 did not lead to a serious rupture in their relations with Israel.

The republics of the former Soviet Union were constrained not only by their weakness

but also by pressure exerted by Iran, Turkey, Russia and other powers which competed in the region. Nevertheless, the newly independent republics pursued their foreign policy goals with considerable freedom. Although they were often targets of fierce criticism by Iran they did not refrain from expanding their ties with Israel.² Like all powers that competed in that region Iran was moved primarily by pragmatic reasons. The impression that Iran's main purpose was to export its radical version of Islam cannot be substantiated by evidence. Seen from Tehran's viewpoint, Israel's success in the region was largely due to the failure of the Muslim world to respond to these republics' needs. Asked by Heikal how the Muslim world should approach these republics in the face of Israeli penetration, Rafsanjani said that the Muslim world should be the one to respond to their needs.³ Articles in the Iranian press attributed sinister intentions to Israel's attempts to expand ties with these republics. One of them lamented that, 'While before their independence they had never hosted any Israeli envoy, now Israeli specialists under various pretexts are shuttling there and in none of these former Soviet republics (except Azerbaijan) was IRI able to prevent them from having ties with Israel.'⁴ One newspaper blamed Turkey for cooperating with Israel and thereby encouraging Israel's penetration in the region.⁵ Another argued that the Israeli-Turkish cooperation in the region was primarily aimed at countering Iran's influence.⁶

Although Israel has taken the initiative on most occasions, the rapprochement with these republics cannot be attributed entirely to its successful diplomacy. This rapprochement was part of an overall scheme devised by these republics to seek allies following the breakup of the Soviet Union.⁷ During the Cold War era these republics were an integral part of the Soviet orbit. Though ethnically and culturally unique they maintained political, ideological and cultural ties with the Soviet Union. Moreover, their intellectual and industrial elites spoke Russian and their economies were integrated with the Soviet market.⁸ Consequently, their leaders felt the need to establish contacts with the outside world. In addition, geographical barriers played an important role in their attempt to seek friends and allies. Lacking an outlet to the seas, except the Caspian, these republics were cut off from the rest of the world by high mountain ranges and vast deserts. The disintegration of the Soviet Union intensified their sense of isolation and helplessness. Despite their aspirations, outside Asian powers like Turkey and Japan did not seem capable of promoting economic growth in the region. As for the European countries, they did not seem eager to invest in that region or trade with it. Any hope that a close economic association with Russia would benefit these republics was soon dashed. A rapid fall in the exchange rate of the local currencies introduced following their failures in the rouble zone left these republics in a severe crisis. Moreover, lack of investments led to a rapid deterioration of their economies. The economic crisis deepened as the ethnic and religious conflicts intensified following the collapse of the Soviet state structure.

Under these dire circumstances these republics turned southwards to look for allies. States like Turkey and Iran began to loom large in their foreign policy and soon enough, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt and Israel joined the fray.⁹ Moreover, direct air links were established between these republics and their neighbors. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they became receptive to Israeli overtures. Israel's experience in assisting developing countries throughout the world was an asset too valuable to ignore. For many years the

Israelis had been engaged in providing technical and scientific aid to numerous countries. Its technicians and scientists helped many countries improve their agricultural and industrial techniques. Israel's expertise in water management and drip irrigation was particularly valuable for countries with little arable land. These advantages were not ignored by the leaders of these republics that controlled vast arid lands and could benefit from Israeli innovations which could reduce the amount of water needed for agriculture.

Initially, these republics had demonstrated a tendency to seek rapprochement with the Arab world. However, relations with the Arabs did not seem to pay them handsome dividends.¹⁰ It was their need for investment, technical expertise and close contacts with Washington, rather than the progress made in the Israeli-PLO dialogue, which made them receptive to rapprochement with Israel.¹¹ Although Islamic fundamentalism remained quite strong in these republics, the majority of their population was attracted by the vision of democracy and market economy. The peoples of this poverty-stricken region envisioned the future of their republics modeled not on Iran or Afghanistan but on capitalist Third World countries such as South Korea or Singapore.¹² This is precisely the reason why Israel was among several nations whose ventures in the region proved so successful.

The decision of these republics to establish diplomatic relations with Israel was an outcome of their position as independent states in need of immediate assistance which Israel could offer. What helped Israel gain acceptance in this region was the fact that these republics had cleverly managed to avoid committing themselves to any country or any political ideology despite Saudi efforts to spread fundamentalist influence there.¹³ Moreover, it is likely that the resistance which these republics demonstrated toward Islamic fundamentalism dissuaded the Iranians from attempting to 'export' the Islamic revolution to the region.¹⁴ In their attempts to establish relations with other countries the republics gave preference to Turkey, Egypt and other countries which 'openly denied all manifestations of extremism and fanaticism in Islam'.¹⁵ To those observers and analysts who are accustomed to read between the lines, it was obvious that this stipulation stemmed from pragmatic considerations and did not exclude Israel. Both Israel and the republics were motivated by pragmatic considerations, which explains why they did not rush to sever their relations with Israel with the outbreak of the Intifada al-Aqsa in the autumn of 2000.

Aware of the region's enormous potential and the important future role that these republics could play in the Middle East, Israel began to seek their friendship. Although Ben Gurion's plan to establish a Peripheral Alliance was long forgotten, the idea of establishing ties with countries in the periphery of the Middle East remained part of Israel's modus operandi. Israeli leaders hoped that closer ties would mitigate Islamic resistance to their state. Moreover, reports that the region had large oil and mineral deposits were not dismissed by the Israelis as mere myths. From Israel's viewpoint the Caucasus region was an important route leading to Central Asia's vast mineral resources and markets.

From the republics' point of view rapprochement with Israel did not entail commitment of any kind. Kimche, who had long been in contact with these republics, said that he found 'no hesitation' among them to establish links with Israel.¹⁶ So far, the republics had successfully resisted repeated attempts made by other states in the region to

transform their systems or to reorient their foreign policies. Saudi Arabia, whose purpose was to revive Islam in this region, provided generous financial assistance. Iran courted these republics mainly for economic and security reasons. Turkey attempted to steer them in a secular direction and sought to benefit from their economic potential. Even states such as Pakistan tried to benefit by influencing their political, religious and economic orientation.¹⁷ Both political and commercial motives had led Israel to intensify its efforts in order to strengthen its ties and to establish diplomatic relations with these republics and both are examined here.

Israel's diplomatic efforts in these republics began long before the end of the Cold War, which released them from their commitment to align themselves with a superpower. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused concern in Israel as well as in the Arab world. Saudi efforts to spread religious propaganda in the Muslim republics led many Israelis to fear that they would soon emerge as centers of Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁸ In an interview on Israeli television on 11 September 1991, Barak said, 'New Muslim republics in Asia don't seem...something that will add to our health, at least in the long term.'¹⁹ In addition, political and economic imperatives played a major role in Israel's attempt to approach these republics. As the Israelis saw it, rapprochement with them meant not only reduced Arab influence, but also additional votes in the United Nations.

Israeli politicians, who had long recognized the danger of Islamic fundamentalism in the region, decided to act promptly and to establish ties with these republics. Thus in his speech at the Knesset on 24 December 1991, Foreign Minister David Levy announced Israel's decision to recognize all former Soviet republics. He expressed his hope that in return Israel would be able to obtain their cooperation and that they would facilitate Jewish immigration to Israel.²⁰ Interest in this region did not remain confined to politics. Israeli businessmen saw opportunities for enormous profits in the region. As for the Arab states and the Palestinians, Israel's interest in the region was disquieting. Arab politicians and commentators were quick to warn that Israel was gaining influence in the region and called upon these republics to join the Muslim world in opposition to Israel and the West.²¹ In addition, the Arab states embarked on an intense diplomatic campaign aimed at earning the good will of these republics. Arab relations with Georgia were cordial from the beginning. Even Arab-Armenian relations remained friendly despite the fact that the Arab states supported Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. In February 1992, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faysal toured the region. The visit led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and all Muslim republics. The prince promised economic aid and stated that his country had 'focused its attention on cooperation with brothers in the Islamic world'.²² This event was widely publicized and a wave of fundamentalism seemed to have engulfed the region. Advocates of an alliance between the Muslim republics and the radical states of the Middle East became more vocal. Their messages intensified Israel's resolve to increase its efforts in the region, and what enabled Israel to expand its activities in that region with greater ease was the fact that the United States encouraged its endeavor.

By the summer of 1992, Israel has taken the opportunity to join the United States in an effort to assist these republics. The US government announced its decision to contribute US\$5 million for development projects in that region. Simultaneously, Foreign Minister Peres stated his government's intention to assist the republics by sending agriculture and

public health experts.²³

Although the leaders of these republics welcomed Israeli attempts to approach them they feared the consequences of such rapprochement. Their fear intensified when Islamic militants began expressing their objection and criticized them for making contacts with Israel and for allowing its citizens to become increasingly involved in commercial ventures which they regarded as exploitative. The opposition to Israel became particularly vocal in 1992 in events which caused concern in Israel. As it turned out, however, the Muslim republics were not receptive to fundamentalist ideas. Pragmatism triumphed over religious and ideological considerations. The leaders of the Muslim states thought primarily in terms of their immediate needs. They highly appreciated Israel's ability and willingness to establish commercial ties and to invest in the region. Furthermore, they considered Israel's ties with the United States and its ability to mobilize American Jewry in its favor as indispensable assets. Gradually, entrepreneurs, whose main concern was to reap commercial benefits, and political advocates of close relations with Israel gained the upper hand in these republics.

The republics' wealth in mineral and oil resources provided a powerful incentive for Israeli entrepreneurs who did not fail to appreciate the region's enormous economic potential. Kibbutz members as well as private businessmen discovered that there were major profits to be made. One of the prominent entrepreneurs who sought to benefit from the area's vast resources was Eisenberg, whose deals in many Asian countries had earned him handsome profits. Eisenberg was one of numerous Israeli citizens who obtained government support for their ventures in that region. These entrepreneurs regarded the region as a gold mine of opportunities and went there for the sole purpose of profit-making. As one industrialist, Eitan Yisraeli, put it: 'I am not going to Central Asia for Zionist principles. I am going there to make money.'²⁴ Joseph Maiman of the Merhav investment corporation spoke in a similar vein saying, 'we are a business operation aiming to penetrate a market and to be profitable in doing so'.²⁵ The Israeli government provided incentives for such entrepreneurs in the hope that these commercial enterprises would help expand the mutual cooperation between the two sides and curb Iranian influence in the region.

The republics became aware of Israel's potential as soon as they obtained their independence from the Soviet Union. Many officials and businessmen visited Israel and sought to establish commercial ties with Israeli firms. Another leading Israeli firm was the irrigation equipment manufacturer, Netafim, whose contacts in the region began long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, progress was slow and many difficulties stood in its way. Not only were the republics apprehensive regarding the reaction of the Arab world, they were also suspicious of the Israeli entrepreneurs whom they regarded as bright and crafty. Moreover, they complained about the lack of business ethics on the part of the Israeli entrepreneurs.

The Eisenberg Group continued to expand its activities by building factories for the production of cotton-picking machines and other farming and industrial products. Most of the deals made with the Israelis were based on barter due the severe shortage of hard currency in these republics. As Benny Naividel, manager of the Israeli-Russia and CIS Chamber of Industry and Commerce said, 'Many of these countries do not have solid currencies, and we can't count on immediate cash transactions...what we depend on are

barter arrangements.²⁶ These agreements stipulated that Israel would receive abundant supplies of raw materials such as cotton, gasoline and wool in return for its services. The Israelis gradually increased their involvement in the region by supplying these republics with sophisticated technology of all kinds and they closely coordinated their activities with the United States.

Political considerations played a marginal role in the decision of these republics to approach Israel. It was primarily the dire economic predicament in which they found themselves in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union that led them to attach great importance to their relations with Israel. The Israelis, however, were motivated by different concerns. By joining the competition in the region the Israelis hoped to lessen the threat that foreign movements such as pan-Turanism and Islamic fundamentalism could have on the region. What facilitated Israel's penetration in the region was the fact that the leaders of these republics valued the enthusiasm of the Israeli entrepreneurs and were determined to benefit from their experience. The rewards which could accrue from friendly relations with Israel were not confined to trade. The new republics saw other benefits in this rapprochement. Concerned about their security they embarked on a campaign aimed at building their defense forces and therefore began searching for arms suppliers; thus their cooperation with Israel expanded to the military field as well. Although both sides had constantly denied that such collaboration existed, statements often made by politicians and military officials on both sides indicate that plans for joint military ventures were discussed. Asked to confirm whether Israel was actively involved in such activities, Brigadier General Yitzhak Gat, President of the RAFAEL Armament Development Authority said, 'RAFAEL definitely has the desire and the interest to cooperate with these countries and we have prepared several proposals that include joint industrial ventures. We have started to create connections which have to be deepened. The topic is on our agenda.'²⁷

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War had left the Israeli government in a quandary. It was necessary to prove to Washington that despite the disappearance of the Soviet threat there was need to prolong the strategic alliance. Some observers argued that since the Soviet threat in the Middle East had practically disappeared and the Arab states could no longer count on Soviet help, Washington did not have to be tied to costly obligations such as maintaining a strategic alliance with Israel. Although American ships continued to arrive for repairs in Haifa there was serious concern in Israel that the strategic collaboration with the United States was about to lose its *raison d'être*. The US-Israeli partnership began in the early 1970s, and during the Reagan era it developed to such an extent that the Israelis had taken great pride in it. Thus, for example, in his interview with a journalist Shamir said:

Since the US had agreed to a strategic cooperation with Israel... the attitude toward Israel has drastically changed, and there were a myriad of laudatory expressions. I heard utterances such as 'Who could possibly compare to you? Who could even dream of such standing as you have in the US?'²⁸

Accustomed to regarding the US partnership as one of the main foundations of their nation's security, Israeli leaders and strategists were left with the dilemma of finding a

justification for prolonging the alliance. Both the Labor and the Likud parties placed an emphasis on cordial relations with the United States. Rabin was determined to improve US-Israeli relations, which suffered a serious setback during the Shamir era, when the US government disapproved of the Likud settlement policy in the West Bank and Gaza and turned down Israel's request for US\$10 million loan guarantees designed to help it absorb the flood of Soviet immigrants. Not only did Rabin seek to obtain the loan guarantees, he also wanted to reach a mutual understanding on defense matters. This was particularly important in the summer of 1990, when the friendship between the two countries suffered a serious setback as a result of press reports which claimed that Israel had sold sophisticated military technology to China. Israel had been denying such reports all along.²⁹ It was only after considerable pressure from George Bush's administration that Israel agreed to stop the exports to China.³⁰ This issue, however, remained unresolved and several months later a new report appeared in the *Washington Times* stating that Israel had transferred Patriot missile technology to China. Both Israel and China denied that such sales had ever taken place.³¹ Nevertheless, officials in Washington were not convinced and continued to criticize Israel. The Israeli government continued to be concerned about the future of its relations with Washington and therefore welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with the Americans in joint ventures in the region. US government officials were excited about the idea of promoting Israel as an active player in the area.³² Both countries were interested in keeping the region free from the influence of Islamic fundamentalism originating from Iran. A senior US official stated that such cooperation was possible because Washington was 'terrified of Islamic fundamentalism'.³³ The events in that region provided Israel with the opportunity not only to combat Islamic fundamentalism but also to strengthen its ties with the United States. As Gerald Steinberg of Bar Ilan University put it, 'In some way we're looking for a peg on which to hang the strategic relationship... I would point to Central Asia.'³⁴ US officials were highly impressed with Israel's technical know-how and were eager to work jointly with its experts in that region. A senior US official commented on the Israeli experts, saying, 'They have unbelievable experience at this, and they do it fast.'³⁵

It is clear that Israel's rapprochement with the new republics could not have been made possible without US consent. With the exception of China, the Israeli government had refrained from pursuing its diplomatic goals whenever there was strong resistance from Washington. Israel's desire to cultivate US good will manifested itself clearly in the summer of 1993, when it yielded to Washington's request to cease all contacts with North Korea.³⁶ Washington's interference in matters affecting foreign policy was often resented by the Israelis and attracted sharp criticism in the press.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Israelis deemed it wise to comply with the demand. When asked about the status of Israeli-North Korean relations a Foreign Ministry official told the author, 'There aren't any at the moment.'³⁸ Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin later admitted that this step came as a result of opposition from Washington.³⁹ Similarly, Israel's military cooperation and the sale of arms to Vietnam, whose government sought to upgrade its obsolete Soviet arsenal, had been suspended as a result of US pressure,⁴⁰ and when Cuba made an attempt at rapprochement with Israel in the autumn of 1993, its overtures were rejected in deference to US requests.⁴¹ Washington's interference with Israel's relations with the new republics was no exception. In January 1992, Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akayev

held talks with Rabin and Peres in which he announced his decision to open an Embassy in Jerusalem.⁴² He also stated that the city 'cannot be divided'.⁴³ Akaev's announcement was not well received in Washington. Israel's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Ben Tsion Carmel had learned that the United States had pressured the Kyrgyzi government to renege on its promise. Carmel revealed the content of a letter stating Washington's concern that such a move could jeopardize the Middle East peace negotiations. In addition, there was considerable pressure from Muslim countries on Akaev despite the fact that he spoke vigorously in favor of creating a Palestinian state.⁴⁴ Hoping to obtain economic assistance, Akaev yielded to US pressure.⁴⁵ He agreed to open an Embassy in Jerusalem but not before the signing of an agreement to hold elections to the Palestinian autonomy council. Aware of the fact that Akaev could become a target of Muslim as well as American pressure the Israelis were not surprised and merely stated that they were disappointed at this turn of events.⁴⁶

In November 1992, the republics joined the Economic Corporation Organization (ECO), which included Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The purpose of this organization was to provide a common market for its members. However, Iran seemed to be the main beneficiary. Iranian involvement in the region has increased significantly due to its ability to provide alternative foreign trade routes for the republics, via its territory, or through its ports in the Persian Gulf. Iran's relations with Uzbekistan remained tense during 1992. However, a visit by President Karimov to Iran in November 1992 improved the relations considerably and important bilateral agreements were signed. The Iranian government did not confine its activities to trade. It made efforts to strengthen its cultural links with the Muslim republics, especially with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The new cultural association of Persian-speaking countries *Majma'a-i-Farhagni*, which linked Iran with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, was formed in 1992.⁴⁷ Despite these efforts, however, the Iranian model found no acceptance in the Muslim republics.⁴⁸

Less threatening from Israel's point of view, but no less commercially formidable than Iran, was Turkey's intervention. In order to establish long-lasting relationships with the new republics, Turkey began providing them with the infrastructure necessary for rapid industrial growth.⁴⁹ Despite lacking large amounts of hard currency Turkey's expertise in industry and manufacturing was more impressive than either Iran or Pakistan. Turkey offered a total of US\$1.2 billion and many Turkish firms began investing in the region. Despite initial fears of Turkish aims, the new republics were receptive to commercial ventures from Ankara. However, they had good reasons to question its motives because many Turkish radicals envisioned a great Pan-Turkic empire encompassing the entire region. Turkey's leaders had often alluded to their country's affinity with these republics. For example, during his visit to these republics in May 1992, Demirel had stated that, 'nobody can now deny that there is a Turkic world stretching from the shores of the Adriatic to the walls of China'.⁵⁰ However, these claims were never adopted as the official government position and although serious efforts were made in order to spread propaganda in the region there was never any likelihood that these could lead to Turkish domination there.⁵¹ Özal did not encourage such ambitions; quite the contrary—he repudiated them as soon as they were heard.⁵² Likewise, Turkish scholars dismissed the possibility that Pan-Turkism would play any role in the region in the foreseeable future. Thus, for example, Surku Gurel of Ankara University argued that, 'the fear of a revival of

Pan-Turkism along with Pan-Islamism as a consequence of Turkey's efforts in Central Asia is unfounded'.⁵³ The governments of these republics had never demonstrated any tendency to be culturally or ideologically influenced by any other foreign power, as US Senator Alan Cranston had witnessed in his visit to the region. In his report to the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee he said:

Turkey and Pakistan would like to play a major role in Central Asia, and the latter looking to an Islamic commonwealth. Both countries have sent businessmen into Central Asia, and Turkey has sought to enhance its influence by setting up a television station. I do not get the impression that either country will succeed as Central Asians feel neither particularly Turkish, nor Islamic enough to find a Muslim commonwealth an attractive concept.⁵⁴

In any case, the Israelis, who had established full diplomatic relations with Turkey in 1991, did not seem overly concerned about the potential threat which it might pose to the region. As the Israelis viewed it, Iranian fundamentalism constituted a greater threat than Pan-Turanism in the region. In fact, they believed that Turkish presence was likely to enhance Israel's by serving as a bridge to these republics.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Turkey became locked in a fierce competition with Russia and there was a growing concern in Turkish government circles that Russia's influence was increasing. Russia's involvement in the region was largely motivated by the desire to curb the expansion of militant Islam emanating from Tajikistan.⁵⁶ Having identical interests, the Israelis were not overly concerned about Russia's growing influence in the region. Iran's ambitions in the area were far more disquieting for the Israelis, who decided to intensify their activities there.⁵⁷ Iran's influence became obvious and worrisome to the Israelis when Tajikistan adopted the Persian alphabet. President Rahman Nabiyeu increased Iran's influence in Tajikistan in 1992 by signing a treaty of friendship which expanded the cooperation in culture, commerce and science. Moreover, Iran provided Tajikistan 300,000 tons of free oil worth about US\$40 million in order to ease the energy crisis there.⁵⁸

Apart from Iran and Turkey, Central Asia attracted the attention of other countries such as Pakistan, China and India, which began jockeying for the region's enormous potential. Pakistan began collaborating with the republics on projects involving communications. The Chinese seemed determined to strengthen their economic ties with the republics in order to find a market for their consumer goods and to promote modernization within Xinjiang. Other considerations affecting Chinese policy were the desire to encourage the secular elements in the region and to prevent it from becoming a bedrock of Islamic fundamentalism or Pan-Turanism.⁵⁹ Uzbekistan's President Karimov scored a major victory in New Delhi when he met India's Prime Minister Rao at the beginning of January 1994. The two leaders agreed to cooperate in many commercial and technological ventures and primarily, they reiterated their resolve to combat religious fundamentalism.⁶⁰ The Israelis shared similar interests as they sought to gain influence in the region in order to prevent the possible emergence of a non-Arab coalition of Islamic states. Moreover, the fears that the republics might transfer nuclear know-how to Iraq or other Arab countries intensified Israel's diplomatic efforts in the region.⁶¹ In their meetings with the leaders of these republics, Israeli officials expressed their concern and

sought reassurance that other countries would not be able to obtain nuclear materials.⁶² Such concerns led the Israeli government to exert influence in the region in every way possible. Therefore, it quickly responded to attempts made by these republics to establish commercial ties and constantly raised the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with them.

The establishment of diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan remained high on the agenda of the Israeli Foreign Ministry following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Here, as in the Muslim states of Central Asia, the Israelis began to search for economic opportunities and political gains. By the end of 1993, Azerbaijan's President Geydar Aliyev contacted the Israelis. Efrayim Sneh, the Israeli Knesset member from the Labor Party, visited Baku, where he met Aliyev and other Azeri dignitaries. Following his visit Sneh announced that Azerbaijan was eager to enhance its economic and cultural ties with Israel.⁶³ Since then, trade has been increasing in leaps and bounds and many Israeli food products such as beer and chocolate have found their way to the Azeri groceries.⁶⁴ What promoted good will between the two governments was the fact that the Jewish community in Azerbaijan had been thriving. Some 20,000 Jews remained in Azerbaijan and some of them had become prosperous. The Jewish community continuously benefited from normal relations with the Azeri government and Jewish immigration to Israel continued without restriction following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Azeri regime remained moderate and its attitude toward the Jewish community remained benign. Moreover, the Azeri government's attempts to prevent the rise of fundamentalism and to maintain a distance from Iran made it an attractive candidate for diplomatic relations with Israel. The APF, which came to power following the breakup of the Soviet Union, adopted a pro-Western orientation, which meant that normal relations could be maintained with the United States, Europe and, quite strongly, Israel.⁶⁵ However, Israel's relations with Azerbaijan were characterized by neglect and indifference on the part of the Israelis. The Azeri regime's openness to Western influence and its desire to attract Western investments had always provided an incentive for Israeli businessmen. Yet despite all these considerations the Israelis were not quick to send an Ambassador to Azerbaijan and Foreign Ministry officials did not demonstrate much eagerness to approach that country. In 1992, the two countries agreed to exchange ambassadors but the Israelis did not operate with the alacrity characteristic of their diplomatic contacts in other countries. Israel's only representative in Baku was Benny Haddad, a 24-year-old veteran who was sent there to encourage Jewish immigration to Israel. The fact that Israel failed to send an experienced diplomat to Baku puzzled many Azeris and Israelis alike. Senior diplomats in the Israeli Foreign Ministry were continuously vying for vacancies in the attractive capitals of the Western world. Baku lacked luxurious facilities that could attract competent and experienced diplomats. Furthermore, the political unrest remained a major concern for the Israelis. Anxious to benefit from Israel's technical know-how and its contacts with the United States, the Azeri government sought to open a dialogue with Israel. Secretary of State Ali Karimov told Israeli correspondent Ehud Ya'ari that he wished to arrange a meeting between President Elchibey and Rabin.⁶⁶ Moreover, Baku's mayor, Memet Gulmamedov, declared Baku a twin city to Haifa and searched for investors to open a hotel, which he intended to call 'Israel'. There were even devout Muslims who were interested in connections with Israel. For example, the spiritual leader

of the Muslims in the Caucasus, Shaikh Hajallah Ben Himet had openly advocated establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. However, Ben Himet's fear of criticism from the Arab states led him to rule out the possibility of visiting Israel.⁶⁷

The prospects of establishing friendly relations with Azerbaijan appealed to the Israelis but the danger of alienating Armenia in the process had to be taken into consideration. Azerbaijan and Armenia were locked in a struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh, and to some extent over Nakhichevan.⁶⁸ Naturally, the Azeri government expected Israel's support or at least neutrality in this conflict, but Israel resisted the temptation to sell arms to the Armenians and thus managed to avoid taking a stand. Moreover, Israel did not wish to impair its newly established relations with Turkey. The Israeli government was so keen on guarding its relations with Turkey that it ignored the Armenian massacre of 1915 and did not even mention it in its educational curriculum.⁶⁹ Mentioning the Armenian massacre could not only impair Turkish-Israeli relations but also be regarded by the Azeri government as a pro-Armenian stand in the current conflict. Moreover, the Israeli government continued to maintain neutrality and refrained from using its influence in the US Congress to support the Armenian-sponsored resolution to establish a day of remembrance for the genocide. By 1985, the Israeli government went to the extent of refusing to support an Armenian historical conference in Jerusalem.⁷⁰

Despite its desire to be on good terms with the US government, the Azeri government did not go as far as overtly supporting Israel. One of the reasons for this cautious policy was the Azeri fear of Iranian hostility. This fear intensified as a result of an intense propaganda campaign waged by Iran. The Iranian government had exploited every opportunity to castigate Elchibey, whom it regarded as a Turkish agent. Moreover, Iranian officials argued that Elchibey was determined to undermine their country's vital interests in the region and called upon Demirel to persuade him to cease his hostile activities against Iran. One Majlis member called Elchibey a Zionist agent and condemned his contacts with Israel.⁷¹ In addition, local Muslim clerics and pro-Iran elements lashed out at the government for its political and commercial contacts with Israel. They opposed the government's secular policy and spoke openly against the connection with the Israelis whom they regarded as the enemies of Islam. For these elements, connections with Israel symbolized not only an open admission that Islam was inferior but also tolerance toward non-Muslim practices.

Such formidable opposition compelled the Azeri government not only to demonstrate neutrality but also to prove that it fulfilled a constructive role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Explaining Azerbaijan's approach toward the conflict, Foreign Minister Gasan Gasanov said, 'Azerbaijani diplomacy is making considerable efforts to arrive in common with partners in multilateral cooperation at an unflinching formula of reacting to patent and latent threats to international security.'⁷² Yet despite the criticism by foreign and domestic opponents the Azeri government had considerable freedom of action to promote its relations with Israel. Its ability to maintain a dialogue with Israel stemmed partly from the fact that it never depended on Arab oil.⁷³ In addition, the Azeri government was motivated by the benefits which connections with Israel provided. These included access to Washington through Israeli channels and the acquisition of superb Israeli technology. Also, Aliyev continued to hope that Israel could be persuaded to support his country against Armenia. Aliyev's efforts to secure Israeli cooperation in its attempt to gain US

support for its struggle against Armenia were unrelenting. In his meeting with Rabin on 23 October 1995, he mentioned his country's difficulties with Armenia. He asked Rabin to speak on his country's behalf in his briefings with US officials, arguing that this was particularly important since the Armenian lobby had managed to gain considerable influence in Washington. Aliyev explained that despite the cease-fire between the two countries more than 20 per cent of his country was still occupied and many refugees continued to reside in camps. He argued that both Russia and Iran supported Armenia and that Iran was bent on suppressing the Azeri independence movement. Aliyev's complaints were not without foundation. Indeed, Iran had frequently interfered in Azeri politics, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Azeri government began to form alliances with foreign countries. Iran's pressure on Aliyev to sever his ties with Israel was unrelenting. Feeling isolated and threatened, Aliyev went to the extent of asking Rabin for military assistance. Rabin responded by saying that Israel would use its influence to increase US aid to Azerbaijan but made no commitments regarding military assistance.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Azeri government remained open to the idea of cooperation with Israel and in September 1997 Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Azerbaijan. During that meeting both sides discussed the possibility of cooperating with Turkey in order to combat Islamic fundamentalism.

The rapprochement between Israel and Azerbaijan encouraged Armenia to approach Israel. However, there were other reasons why Armenia sought better relations with Israel. Armenia's position in the South Caucasus was precarious because it had to maneuver between the rivalries and the alliances systems of major powers like Iran, Russia, Turkey and the United States in order to find itself a stable role.⁷⁵ Seventy years of Soviet domination had stifled Armenia's political and economic growth and its leaders sought assistance from any country willing to provide it. The Israelis were no less enthusiastic about the prospects of good relations with Armenia. Despite its small size, Armenia's geographical location and its potential ability to develop transit routes for delivering fuel from Russia and the Caspian region were important factors which captured Israel's attention. Israel's main concern, however, was that Armenia promoted good relations with Iran. Nevertheless, the Israelis encouraged the Armenians and diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in April 1992. Armenia's precarious position in the region forced upon its leaders the need to conduct a pragmatic foreign policy. It was largely due to its historical conflict with Turkey that Armenia did not look favorably on the Israeli-Turkish connection. On the other hand, however, Armenia did not relish the prospect of being dependent on Russia or Iran and therefore connection with Israel was regarded as the lesser of two evils. Moreover, the fact that Armenia was in conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh left it in a relative state of isolation and therefore it welcomed Israel's overtures. At the same time there was some tension in Armenia's relations with the Arab states as a result of Azerbaijan's efforts to gain the support of the Arab states by convincing them that the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh was between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan. This, however, did not have a long-lasting impact on Armenia's relations with the Arabs. Neither did the normalization between Israel and Azerbaijan have adverse effect on Armenia's relations with Israel. Concerned about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region, Israel attached considerable value to the fact that Armenia is a Christian

country and intensified its activities there. Realizing that it could benefit from Israel's technical know-how and connections with the United States, the Armenian government saw considerable advantage in the Israeli connection. Although both sides continued to talk about their common historical experiences both were moved by pragmatic considerations. Agreements which provided for cultural and economic cooperation were signed shortly after the establishment of diplomatic relations. In January 2000 Armenia's President Robert Kocharian paid an official visit to Israel and more agreements were signed. Armenia's campaign to obtain Israel's support on the issue of the Armenian massacre came to a successful conclusion in the spring of 2000, when Israel's Education Minister Yossi Sarid decided to include the Armenian massacre in the new curriculum. This decision angered Turkey but satisfied Armenia.⁷⁶

Another small state which attracted Israel's attention after its independence in 1991 was Georgia, a country in a relatively important strategic location in the Caucasus. Unlike Armenia, Georgia had a greater degree of freedom to maneuver among the powers that competed in the region. It maintained good relations with Azerbaijan and when the Israelis demonstrated interest in establishing ties, the Georgian government had no reason to be concerned about the reaction of the surrounding countries. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in June 1992. The Georgian government was interested in obtaining Israel's assistance in farming methods, irrigation and projects involving high-tech. By the end of the decade Israel became interested in a strategic partnership with Georgia. The initial agreement was signed in January 1998, and in March 1999 Netanyahu visited Georgia and the two governments signed a military cooperation agreement.

Of all the republics of the region, Kazakhstan seems to have been the most attractive to the Israelis. Israel's main motive in Kazakhstan was economic. Pressure on the government to improve relations with that country came not only from Foreign Ministry officials but also from the private sector. One of the entrepreneurs who exerted considerable efforts to convince the government to promote better relations with Kazakhstan was Nimrod Novik, Merhav's Vice President who argued that 'Kazakhstan is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, underground, and one of the least developed above ground... The opportunities are enormous and they welcome Israel. We were astonished at the degree to which they are aware of us.'⁷⁷ Merhav's management saw great potential in Kazakhstan and they expected their business to reach up to US\$100 million a year.⁷⁸ The company's spokesman admitted that his men were eager to do business despite the risk involved. He said, 'We started ordering millions of dollars' worth of equipment before the deal was finished.'⁷⁹

After his spectacular success in this vast region, Eisenberg decided to embark on a huge commercial venture in Kazakhstan. By the end of 1992, he signed an agricultural agreement with Kazakhstan valued at approximately US\$160 million. According to its provisions, Eisenberg agreed to provide an irrigation system for 200,000 dunams in the southern province of Chimkent. He also agreed to build a factory for the production of drip irrigation pipes and to provide technicians in order to supervise its operation. The project was estimated to cost Israel US\$130–US\$140 million and the remainder was to be paid by foreign sources.⁸⁰

Politically, Kazakhstan's approach to Israel was similar to Kyrgyzstan but somewhat

more cautious. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev opened his country's doors to Israel but at the same time he thought it prudent to meet Arafat, who visited Alma Ata in December 1991. Nazarbayev recognized the importance of maintaining cordial relations with the United States and with the Arab states. Therefore, he refrained from making radical statements regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and even tried to portray an image of honest broker in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. In an interview with *Yediot Aharonot*, which took place on the day that Kazakhstan agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, he explicitly said that his country's policy toward the conflict was 'even-handed'.⁸¹

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War created a sense of euphoria in the West. Nazarbayev's statement that Kazakhstan had a 'special responsibility', along with Russia, to steer the states in the region away from fundamentalism⁸² encouraged the Western countries and the Israelis alike. However, this upsurge of optimism was accompanied by concern regarding the future of the nuclear weapons which were now possessed by the individual states. Saddam Hussein's efforts to obtain nuclear capability alarmed the Western countries. The Israelis were particularly concerned and therefore saw an urgent need to normalize relations with the republics of the former Soviet Union. This fear can partly account for Israel's feverish activity in the region and for its intense efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan.

Seeking to allay Israeli fears, Nazarbayev said that he would not let the Arab states have access to nuclear weapons. He said in an interview with Amnon Kapeliuk, an Israeli correspondent in Alma-Ata, 'As for the nuclear weapons in our possession, you need not worry. They are meticulously guarded, and it is absolutely impossible to sneak them across the border.'⁸³ Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Tuleutai Suleimenov provided further reassurance, saying:

The existence of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan puts special responsibility on the republic's foreign policy. We have committed ourselves to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as a nuclear-free country. We have repeatedly declared that we have no intention of being a nuclear power, the sincerity of this position is borne out by the suffering which more than one generation of Kazakhstanis has endured.⁸⁴

In the spring of 1992, the Kazakhstani government sent a delegation to Israel where it met senior officials and businessmen. The negotiators agreed that Israel would help Kazakhstan to develop agriculture and livestock breeding and to train specialists.⁸⁵ Ambassador Arye Levin met Nazarbayev, who told him that that Kazakhstan was interested in loans and in Israeli agricultural assistance. Levin expressed his country's interest in investing in various industries in Kazakhstan and the two sides stated that they favored a diplomatic solution to the Palestinian problem.⁸⁶ Several days later, Nazarbayev met Simha Dinitz, President of the Jewish Agency and Chairman of the World Jewish Parliament, who arrived to discuss business opportunities in Kazakhstan. They agreed that cooperation would benefit both sides.⁸⁷ However, while the talk about diplomatic relations triggered a positive response from Nazarbayev, the Israelis continued to suspect that Kazakhstan was selling nuclear weapons to Iran and some Third World

countries.⁸⁸ Unwilling to derail the normalization process, Kazakhstani officials reassured their Israeli counterparts that they had no intention of selling nuclear technology to Iran and thereby helped eliminate the last obstacle to normalization. Full diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in April 1992, and Israel set up an Embassy at Alma Ata. There were even reports that Kazakhstan had given Israel access to nuclear technology in return for economic aid. Concerned about Muslim reaction, Kazakhstani officials denied these reports and referred to them as 'accusations'.⁸⁹ The ties with Kazakhstan came just a week after Israel established relations with Azerbaijan.⁹⁰ Several months later, Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Sergey Tereshchenko arrived in Israel and held meetings with Foreign Minister Peres and heads of private organizations.⁹¹

Undoubtedly, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan was Israel's crowning achievement in the region. What made this rapprochement possible was not only Israel's unusual technical know-how but also the fact that Kazakhstan was relatively free from the constraints which made it difficult for the other states in the region to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Kazakhstan's position as the largest republic in that region allowed its leaders remarkable freedom of action in foreign policy. Like Azerbaijan, it never depended on Arab oil and therefore did not need to kowtow to the demands of OPEC countries.⁹² The ties between Kazakhstan and Israel continued to improve and in the spring of 1994 the Knesset approved a huge specific-purpose credit for Kazakhstan. This was the first time that the Israeli government had taken such a step.

The rapprochement between Israel and Kazakhstan encouraged the rest of the republics to approach Israel. After its independence from Soviet control, Uzbekistan sought alliances with other states in the region. Karimov looked as far as India for friends and allies. He met Indian officials in an effort to promote economic cooperation between the two countries. Israel's technical expertise was a major attraction to him. In fact, Eisenberg's first deal was with Uzbekistan, where he introduced new agricultural techniques such as drip irrigation, which saved enormous quantities of water.⁹³ This was particularly important for Uzbekistan, which became one of the world's largest cotton producers. Since pollution has turned the Aral Sea into an unreliable irrigation source the need for water has become more urgent. Attracted by the prospect of increasing its agricultural output, Uzbekistan responded with alacrity to Eisenberg's initiative. A contract between the two countries was signed in 1991, and an Israeli team from kibbutz Beit Hashita began working on a 10,000-dunam cotton-field. The results astonished the Uzbeks; the cotton harvest increased by 40 per cent, the water usage was reduced by 66 per cent, and there was 10–20 percent less use of fertilizers and pesticides.⁹⁴ After Uzbekistan and Israel decided to establish diplomatic relations on 23 February 1992, the commercial contacts increased even further. In that very month, an Israeli agricultural expert from the government-owned Agridev agricultural development company visited Uzbekistan. He obtained a proposal from the Uzbekistan's Ministry of Agriculture to use Israeli know-how to improve the yield of a single 25,000-acre cotton farm.⁹⁵

This success was followed by an intense Arab campaign designed to keep the two countries apart. Leading this effort was Saudi Arabia, which tried to reduce Israel's influence in Uzbekistan. For a while it seemed that the Saudi move had discouraged Uzbekistan from warming to Israel. An Uzbekistani delegation visited Riyadh in April

1992, and was warmly welcomed by the Saudis. In a joint communiqué both sides called for a 'just solution to the Palestine issue, including the implementation of the all-encompassing national rights of the Palestinian people'.⁹⁶ The Saudis had also exerted pressure which resulted in the cancellation of a conference planned by the Dagestan-Israeli Friendship Society and of a ceremony which had been arranged to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Uzbekistan.⁹⁷ In addition, the Saudis sought to keep Israel away from Uzbekistan by agreeing to finance the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹⁸ Yet despite its pro-Palestinian statements, Uzbekistan moved ahead with the normalization process. The ties between the two countries continued to be cordial and in October 1997 the Uzbekistani government decided to open an Embassy in Israel.

One of the last countries in the region to establish diplomatic relations with Israel was Turkmenistan. What prevented Turkmenistan from normalizing relations with Israel was mainly its fear of Iranian reaction. When asked why his country did not follow the example set by the other Muslim republics, Turkmenistan's Ambassador Halil Ugur told the author: 'We were concerned about Iran's reaction to our friendship with Israel because we share a long border with it.'⁹⁹ As it turned out, however, the bilateral relations improved considerably and Iran's opposition has significantly abated. Turkmenistan's President Turkmenbashi Niyazov met Iranian leaders and discussed plans to build a railway and a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to the Indian Ocean through Iran. The Iranian government sought to benefit from cordial relations with Turkmenistan, whose natural resources were enormous. Therefore, there was not much incentive in Tehran to interfere in Turkmeni affairs. This became abundantly clear from the mild manner in which the Iranian government reacted to the establishment of communal farms based on the Israeli kibbutz concept by Turkmenistan. Ambassador Ugur told the author, 'They just told us to make sure that these farms are not close to the Iranian border.'¹⁰⁰ Another factor that encouraged the Turkmenistani government to adopt bold decisions was the fact that Niyazov's regime was highly authoritarian and the opposition, secular or religious, was negligible. The stability of the regime was reinforced by the fact that the ruling Democratic Party controlled the same power base as the former Communist Party. Niyazov's ability to demonstrate his independence became abundantly clear when he decided to drift away from the CIS. What further helped Niyazov conduct an independent foreign policy apart from the economic resources was the fact that the Turkmenis constituted the majority in the country.

In October 1993, Turkmenistan decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. A delegation from Turkmenistan visited Israel in December 1994. Its members met Israel's Deputy Minister of Agriculture and they discussed the possibility of cooperating on joint projects. In the spring 1995, Niyazov arrived in Israel with a delegation of 50 men whose purpose was to explore cooperation with Israel in many fields, including the military.¹⁰¹ Asked what eventually led to his government's determination to take such a bold step, Ugur told the author: 'It was Israel's unusual technical ability. The Israelis showed us how to irrigate by using very little water.'¹⁰² Turkmenistan was also reported to have received military assistance from Israel.¹⁰³ So eager were the Turkmeni officials to cooperate with Israel that in the spring of 1997 Foreign Minister Boris Sheikmuradov requested a meeting with National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon to discuss the

supply of natural gas to Israel.¹⁰⁴

Witnessing the enormous benefits which relations with Israel brought to its neighbors, the Kyrgyzi government became just as eager to benefit from Israeli expertise. Akaev's willingness to open an Embassy in Jerusalem had demonstrated how eager he was to obtain Israeli technical assistance. Both he and his aides had indicated that they were interested in cooperating with Israel in agriculture and water management. Moreover, they expressed a desire to purchase agricultural equipment and energy technology.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, Israeli representatives had taken the opportunity to approach Tajikistan as well. Despite strong Iranian influence and popular opposition to normalizing relations with Israel, the government opened its doors to Israel. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in April 1992. The announcement triggered an angry response from Muslims in Tajikistan. A demonstration by fundamentalists in the streets of Tajikistan had a ripple effect in all the Muslim republics. Many Muslims carried banners calling for 'death to Israel'. Nevertheless, pragmatic considerations prevailed and on 3 August 1993, Tajikistan's President Rakhman Nabiyeu met Israel's Ambassador to Russia Arye Levin in Dushanbe. Nabiyeu announced that his country 'badly needs Israeli economic, scientific and technical potential involvement in the development of our republic's economy'.¹⁰⁶ He took the opportunity to invite the Israeli business community to participate in his country's economy, both in the state-run and private enterprises, to create power-consuming industries and to cooperate in the use of mineral resources. The Israeli Ambassador welcomed Nabiyeu's willingness to cooperate in joint ventures and said that Israel was willing to provide agricultural training to Tajik youth. He took the occasion to introduce Joseph Ben-Dor as Israel's Chargé d'Affaires to Tajikistan.

Israel's penetration in the region was not confined to the states of the former Soviet Union. Foreign Ministry officials were also interested in reaching Mongolia. Interest in that country began shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1948, Golda Meir, then Israel's Ambassador to Moscow, met with the Mongolian Ambassador to Moscow but nothing concrete came of this meeting. Nor did Israel aggressively pursue the issue of diplomatic relations. The Foreign Ministry was preoccupied with the countries of Eastern Europe whose Jewish populations needed attention and encouragement to immigrate to Israel. The issue of relations with Mongolia re-emerged in the mid-1960s. When Eban met Mongolia's Foreign Minister Mangalyn Dugerseren in the United Nations, in the autumn of 1966, he raised the possibility of diplomatic relations and stated that Israel was interested in establishing an Embassy in Mongolia. Dugerseren said that his country was interested in ties with the Arab states because 'Mongolia had much in common with them'; however, he said that this did not preclude the possibility of normal relations with Israel. He expressed interest in commercial exchange and cooperation in agriculture. When asked whether the Israeli Ambassador could visit Mongolia he replied that he had no objection to such a visit.¹⁰⁷ However, when the Israelis began to pursue the matter more seriously the Mongolians did not seem very enthusiastic. Israeli diplomats who met a Mongolian diplomat in Prague found him cool and unresponsive.¹⁰⁸ Mongolian representatives appeared formal and polite toward their Israeli counterparts but remained distant. When the Mongolian Ambassador assumed his position in Prague in early 1967, he wrote to the Israeli Ambassador, 'I avail myself of this opportunity to convey to you, Excellency, the assurance of my highest

consideration, and my wishes to continue relations, both personal and between our two missions.'¹⁰⁹ Officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry regarded such statements as evasive and discouraging but the issue of diplomatic relations was not dropped from the agenda.

In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, one official suggested that Israel make another attempt to approach Mongolia. He argued that the tension between Russia and China provided Mongolia significant room for maneuver and independence. He therefore recommended that Israel send an Ambassador from its Embassy in Moscow or the United Nations. He added that 'the current situation seems convenient for our connection with them and it would enable us to obtain a political foothold in the camp of the Communist Bloc in Asia'.¹¹⁰ When asked to explain what Israel did in order to promote better relations with Mongolia, the Director General of the Asian Division in the Foreign Ministry said that Israel had tried to establish ties with Mongolia several times in the past but Mongolia's unenthusiastic response was discouraging. The cooperation between the countries remained limited to sports and youth activities. There were mutual visits by chess players of both countries and a socialist conference in which youth of both countries participated. Nevertheless, the Israeli Foreign Ministry accepted the recommendation and embarked on another attempt to explore the possibility of reaching Mongolia.¹¹¹

The attempt to approach Mongolia gained momentum in the early part of 1967. One Israeli official, Benjamin Sella, who met P.W. Summercastle, First Secretary at the British Embassy in Tokyo wrote about the latter's assessment of the situation:

Mongolia in his view is prepared to act more independently than in the past insofar as the current China-Soviet rift has given her an opportunity for greater self-assertion. In this connection Mongolia is ready to consider ties with Western and other countries outside the Soviet orbits or is even eagerly courting such. He had the impression that Mongolia was now fairly affluent and though backward in many ways is seeking to up-date the economy by introduction of new productive lines in farming and some industry.

When asked whether or not to approach Mongolia, his interlocutor said, 'you might give it a go'. He felt, however, that Mongolia's geographical isolation, the cost of maintaining a mission and the ideological differences between the two countries could be discouraging. Yet he said that in view of the fact that Mongolia was inclined to end its isolation this would be an opportune time for a new diplomatic initiative.¹¹² However, the response from the Israeli Embassy in New York was that there was not much hope for diplomatic relations with Mongolia in the near future.¹¹³ The approach adopted by the Israeli Foreign Ministry was to pave the way for normalization by contacting Mongolian officials who attended meetings or visited other countries.¹¹⁴ Shortly afterwards, the Six Day War erupted and the Foreign Ministry became preoccupied with more urgent matters. Following the Six Day War, Mongolian officials expressed concern about the plight of the Palestinian people and occasionally criticized Israel's occupation of Arab land. Moreover, Mongolia condemned Israel's involvement in Lebanon.¹¹⁵ Mongolia's sympathy toward the Palestinian people led to the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PLO on 25 April 1979. Nevertheless, the two countries began moving toward

normalization during the 1980s. This was largely because the Mongolian government wished to improve its relations with the United States. Moreover the reputation which the Israeli experts had acquired in agricultural technology was regarded by the Mongolian government as an indispensable asset. However, it was not until the international climate began to change by the end of the 1980s, that Mongolian officials became receptive to the idea of diplomatic relations with Israel. The fall of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Middle East peace process had substantially reduced the risk which connections with Israel entailed and on 2 October 1991 the two countries established diplomatic relations.

Israel's rapprochement with the republics in that region was a result of a unique combination of factors: the fall of the Soviet Union, which allowed them to conduct an independent foreign policy with almost complete disregard to Moscow's interests; the poor state of their economies which forced them to seek foreign assistance from any source; their unwillingness to be at the mercy of Islamic fundamentalism; their independence of Arab oil; and their desire to maintain cordial relations with the United States. So far, all other countries that became involved in the region have failed to assist them in any substantial way. Israel, whose foreign policy has become particularly aggressive in recent years, has successfully exploited this favorable set of circumstances. Israel has several advantages which made it particularly attractive for these republics. First, it had expertise in science and technology, particularly in agriculture, which could be of immediate use in these countries. Second, it had strong connections in the United States. Third, the onset of the peace negotiations in the region made Israel appear less threatening. Therefore, normalizing relations with Israel has become much less risky than in the past. The fact that Muslim countries such as Turkey and Morocco have decided on establishing diplomatic relations with Israel helped this process considerably. Tunisia has also announced its decision to normalize its relations with Israel and the withdrawal from the major cities of the occupied West Bank made Israel appear less aggressive. Furthermore, the prospects of a Syrian-Israeli agreement on the Golan Heights did not completely vanish. The only country which expressed its disapproval of the rapprochement between Israel and the Muslim republics was Iran, whose officials warned Azerbaijan about the danger of a 'Zionist plot' to undermine the cooperation in the Muslim world.¹¹⁶ However, despite Tehran's attempt to sabotage the rapprochement, Aliyev did not make any anti-Israeli remarks. Similarly, when Peres told Karimov, during his visit to Tashkent on 3 July 1994, that Israel and Uzbekistan are united in a war against fundamentalism, the latter did not respond.¹¹⁷ His cautious approach had clearly indicated that he wished to maintain good relations with Israel without antagonizing the Muslim world. Future events were to prove this to be an impossible task. In August and September 1999, Islamic radicals, which included Uzbeks, Afghans, Arabs and other foreigners, launched an assault from Tajikistan into the Fergana Valley in an attempt to overthrow Karimov's regime, which they claimed was supported by Israeli bayonets.¹¹⁸

So far, the failure of former Prime Minister Barak's peace proposal at Camp David and the subsequent violence in the occupied territories does not seem to have had serious consequences for the future of Israel's relations with these republics. Apart from sporadic statements condemning Israel's handling of the Intifida al-Aqsa the republics had not shown any willingness to sever their relations with Israel.

Now that all the republics maintain normal relations with Israel what are the prospects

for continued cooperation and what would be their likely attitude toward the Jewish state in the future? It seems that in the foreseeable future the republics will remain interested in normal relations and that Israel's technical expertise will continue to be an important factor in their considerations. It is difficult to imagine a revival of the Soviet Union in its former boundaries. Nor is it likely that Iran would interfere in order to keep these states apart from Israel. Since all these republics still depend on US foreign aid it is difficult to see how this trend could be reversed even if the peace process were to falter.

NOTES

1. Yaroslav Trofimov and Jonathan Karp, 'Tel Aviv Overtures: Some Asian Muslim Nations Warm Towards Israel', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 157, No. 27 (7 July 1994), p. 28.
2. Iranian official sources had repeatedly condemned these republics for their relations with Israel. An Iranian daily stated that, 'The leaders of these republics, although pretend in observing Islam [*sic*], are in fact the same former communist bosses who have no prohibition to expand relations with Israel,' *Jomhuri Islami*, 19 September 1992. Cited in *EOI* (October 1992), p. 4.
3. Extracts of President Rafsanjani's interview with Heikal aired on Lebanese Television on 28 November 1993, *EOI* (November 1993), p. 24.
4. *Resalat* (Tehran), 4 January 1994, cited in *EOI* (January 1994), p. 4. Parentheses are in the text.
5. *Resalat*, 14 April 1994, cited in *EOI* (April 1994), p. 5.
6. *Salam*, 6 November 1994, cited in *EOI* (November 1994), p. 7.
7. Dmitry Volsky, 'Central Asia Looks to the South and to the North', *New Times International*, No. 3 (January 1994), p. 25.
8. The Turkic republics whose economies are almost totally dependent on Russia lost many of their Russian industrialists, bankers, intellectuals and other professionals. *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. 46, No 18 (1 June 1994), p. 13.
9. Kiaras Gharabaghi, 'Development Strategies for Central Asia in the 1990s: In Search of Alternatives', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1994), p. 115.
10. Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?* Whitehall Paper Series (London: Royal Institute for Defence Studies, 1993), p. 54.
11. Mark N.Katz, 'Emerging Patterns of International Relations of Central Asia', *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 1 (1994), p. 35.
12. *Soviet Analyst: A Fortnightly Commentary*, Vol. 20, No. 21 (23 October 1991).
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14. Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 32; Maxim Shashenkov, *Security Issues of the Ex-Soviet*

Central Asian Republics (London: Brassey's, 1992), p. 59.

15. *Pravda Vostoka* (Tashkent), October 1993. Cited in Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin and Victor Sergeev (eds), *Central Asia After Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 54.
16. *World Press Review*, Vol. 39, No. 7 (July 1992).
17. Bernard Lewis, 'Rethinking the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 104–5.
18. The spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region seemed real in the early 1990s. The number of mosques and madrasahs in the region increased dramatically. In Tajikistan alone, there were only 17 mosques and 19 churches in 1990. By the end of 1993 there were more than 3,000 mosques and the number of churches remained the same. Mohan Malik, 'China, Central Asia, India and Pakistan Now Come Face-to-Face with Vigorous Separatism', *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 9 (30 September 1993), p. 10.
19. Cited in Daniel Pipes, 'The Event of Our Era: Former Soviet Muslim Republics Change the Middle East', in Menachem Mandelbaum (ed.), *Central Asia and the World* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), p. 83.
20. *Knesset Proceedings*, 25 December 1991.
21. Philip L. Ritcheson, 'Nuclearization in South Asia', *Strategic Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Fall 1993).
22. Riyadh, SPA, FBIS-SOV92039, 27 February 1992, p. 72.
23. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 8 August 1992.
24. *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, 15–21 February 1993, p. 17.
25. *World Press Review*, Vol. 39, No. 7 (July 1992).
26. Cited in *Near East Report*, No. 13 (29 March 1993), p. 59.
27. 'RAFAEL: At the Cutting Edge of Technology—Interview with Brig. Gen (IAF, Ret.) Itzhak Gat, President of RAFAEL Armament Development Authority', *Military Technology*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (May 1993), p. 38.
28. Cited in Naor, *Writing on the Wall*, p. 43.
29. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 23 June 1990.
30. *Washington Post*, 4 October 1991.
31. Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, FBIS-NES-92-058, 25 March 1992; FBIS-NES-92-050, 13 March 1992.
32. *Middle East International*, 19 February 1993, p. 19.
33. *New York Times*, 7 November 1993.
34. *Washington Post*, 28 July 1992.
35. *Ibid.*
36. On 16 August 1993, State Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters, 'We believe that [additional] meetings between Israel and North Korea would not be helpful.' Jon B. Wolfsthal, 'US Prods Israel to Halt Talks with North Korea on Missile Sales', *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 23, No. 7.
37. *Al-Hamishmar*, 15 August 1993.
38. Author's interview with Choshen.
39. *Davar*, 21 October 1993.
40. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 11, 19 March 1994.

41. *Yediot Aharonot*, 28 September 1993.
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43. Moscow, INTERFAX, Radio in English, 25 January 1993.
44. *Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (17 February 1993).
45. Carol R. Saivetz, 'Central Asia: Emerging Relations with the Arab States and Israel', in Hafeez Malik (ed.), *Central Asia: Its Strategic and Future Prospects* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), p. 314.
46. *Davar*, 21 February 1993.
47. Anthony Hyman, 'Moving Out of Moscow's Orbit: The Outlook for Central Asia', *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April 1993), p. 298.
48. *Moscow News*, No. 20 (20–26 May 1994), p. 3.
49. Philip Robins, 'Between Sentiment and Self-Interest: Turkey's Policy Toward Azerbaijan and the Central Asian States', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Autumn 1993), p. 604.
50. Cited in Lillian Craig Harris, 'Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World', *China Quarterly*, No. 133 (March 1993), p. 125.
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52. Hyman, 'Moving Out of Moscow's Orbit', *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 2, p. 299.
53. Surku Gurel, 'Turkey and the Region—A New Role in a Changing Environment', *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1993), p. 81.
54. *Central Asia in Transition: A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations—United States Senate by Senator Alan Cranston, September 1992* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 7.
55. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 November 1993.
56. *Christian Science Monitor*, 9, 13 September 1993.
57. Also active in the region are Islamic fundamentalist organizations whose bases of operation are in Egypt and Syria and are supported by the United Arab Emirates. *Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (October 1992), p. 7.
58. Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 210.
59. Harris, 'Xinjiang', *China Quarterly*, No. 133, p. 123.
60. *India News*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (15 January 1994), pp. 1, 5.
61. Some 20,000 nuclear warheads are estimated to exist in the former Soviet Union, most of which are in Kazakhstan and the Russian eastern autonomous republics. Ryukichi Imai, 'Asian Ambitions, Rising Tensions', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (June 1993), p. 34.
62. Israel's fear was not unfounded. The Kazakhstanis were approached by several countries that wished to obtain nuclear weapons. In the summer of 1993 Kazakhstan reportedly supplied Iran with two nuclear warheads. Assad Homayoun, 'Iran's

- Administration Persists in Searching for Jihad While Neglecting Its Domestic Base', *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (31 July 1993).
63. *Ha'aretz*, 21 December 1993.
64. *New York Times*, 2 June 1994.
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66. *Jerusalem Report*, 17 June 1993.
67. *Ibid.*
68. The Armenian nationalists residing in Baku joined their brethren in Nagorno-Karabakh in accusing the Azeri government of a deliberate attempt to keep the enclave in abject poverty by denying it revenues from the country's oil. They argued that this was a deliberate attempt to encourage the Armenians, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the enclave's population, to leave for Armenia.
69. Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection*, p. 17.
70. *Middle East International*, 24 July 1992.
71. *EOI*, November 1992, p. 7.
72. Gasan Gasanov, 'Azerbaijan: New Diplomacy', *International Affairs* (Moscow), Vol. 7, (1994), pp. 20–1.
73. This was a factor of crucial importance in Israel's relations with Turkey whose dependence on Arab oil forced it to sever its relations with the Jewish state in 1980.
74. *Ha'aretz*, 24 October 1995; *Ma'ariv*, 24 October 1995.
75. Gayane Novikova, 'Armenia and the Middle East', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 2000), p. 1.
<<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a6.html> >
76. *Ha'aretz*, 25 April 2000.
77. Cited in *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 5 September 1992.
78. *Ibid.*
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80. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 5 December 1992.
81. *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 April 1992.
82. Cited in Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad*, p. 121.
83. Cited in *Yediot Aharonot*, 13 April 1992.
84. Tuleutai Suleimenov, 'Some Lines of Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Today', *International Affairs* (Moscow), Vols 3–4 (1994), p. 26.
85. Alma Ata Radio in Kazakh, FBIS-SOV-92-069, 9 April 1992.
86. Moscow INTERFAX, Radio in English, FBIS-SOV-92-072, 14 April 1992.
87. Moscow INTAR-TASS, Radio in English, FBIS-SOV-92-072, 14 April 1992.
88. In August 1992, the Soviet daily *Pravda* quoted from an article which appeared in an Israeli military journal in which the author accused Kazakhstan of selling military technology and three atomic bombs to Iran. Moreover, it mentioned that Kazakhstan has been selling uranium to other Third World countries. This report was denied by Kazakhstan and remained unconfirmed. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'New Frontiers: Iran, the GCC and the CCARs', in Anoushiravan Ehteshami (ed.), *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), p. 103.
89. Dmitri Vertkin, 'Kazakhstan: Independence and Armed Forces', *Defense Analysis*

(Brassey's), Vol. 10 (April 1994), p. 69.

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91. Jerusalem Israel Television Network, FBIS-NES-92-174, 8 September 1992.

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93. Shafiqul Islam, 'Capitalism on the Silk Route?', *Current History*, Vol. 93, No. 582 (April 1994), p. 159.

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98. Riad N.El-Rayyes, 'An Arab Perspective on the Central Asian Republics in the Context of the New World Order', in Ehteshami, *From the Gulf to Central Asia*, p. 226.

99. Author's interview with Turkmenistan's Ambassador Halil Ugur, 14 October 1995.

100. Author's interview with Ugur.

101. Voice of Israel, Jerusalem, in Hebrew, 27 December 1993, BBC/Summary of World Broadcasts, MEW/0314 WME/12 (4 January 1994); *Ha'aretz*, 24 May 1995.

102. Author's interview with Ugur.

103. *Ibid.*

104. The Turkmenis proposed the construction of a pipeline under the Caspian Sea to Turkey from where Israel would be supplied. However, government sources concluded that such a project would be too costly for Turkmenistan. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 8 March 1997.

105. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 30 January 1993.

106. Moscow INTAR-TASS, Radio in English, FBIS-SOV-92-152, 6 August 1992.

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108. Nassi to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4041/11, 22 December 1966.

109. Zargalsajchan to Nassi, ISA 4041/11, 27 January 1967.

110. Sar to Elitzur, ISA 4041/11, 7 March 1967.

111. Elitzur to Rosen, ISA 4041/11, 17 March 1967.

112. Sella to Unna, ISA 4041/11, 9 March 1967.

113. Rosen to Foreign Ministry, ISA 4041/11, 21 March 1976.

114. Elitzur to Raphael, ISA 4041/11, 12 April 1967.

115. 'Report of the Security Council: Questions Concerning the Middle East, September 12, 1978', *International Documents on Palestine 1978* (Beirut: Palestine Institute Studies, 1980), pp. 10, 15.

116. *Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press*, Vol. 46, No. 27 (3 August 1994), p. 22.

117. *Ibid.*

118. A.Smironov, 'U Bishkeka poiavilsia svoi Dagestan', *Segodnia*, 26 August 1999. In Boris Rumer, 'Economic Crises and Growing Intraregional Tensions', in Boris Rumer (ed.), *Central Asia and the New Global Economy* (London: M.E.Sharpe, 2000), p. 38.

Conclusion

The process of normalization with the states of Asia, which began shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, has been long and arduous. Initially, the relations were marred by lack of vitality and enthusiasm on Israel's part. Israel's tendency to regard the West as a source of inspiration and material assistance remained a common feature of its foreign policy orientation. Despite their wealth in natural resources the Asian countries were incapable of contributing to Israel's economy or national security and they lacked the cultural appeal which the European countries had. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they remained marginal on the agenda of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Israel's failure to respond to China's friendly overtures in the early 1950s underscored the importance of ties with the United States and proved that Asia was marginal on the national agenda. Both the Israeli government and senior officials in the Foreign Ministry remained convinced that the West had to come first and that relations with the Asian countries, even those with large populations like China and India, could wait. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such an attitude had an adverse effect on Israel's effort in Asia.

The events which unfolded in the mid-1950s did not augur well for the future of Israel's relations with the Asian countries. The reluctance of the Asian countries to admit Israel to the Bandung Conference had a crippling effect on Israel's efforts in Asia and the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict reached its climax at that time compounded the difficulties. Israel's victory against Egypt in the Sinai Campaign enhanced its reputation as a partner of the imperialist powers whose sole aim was to exploit the masses of the Third World, and while Ben Gurion continued to cultivate relations with the Western countries whose help was deemed essential to Israel's security, the Asian countries became increasingly hostile to Israel.

Israel's relations with the countries of the Asian continent were marred by other factors which had to do with the way they were handled by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Primarily, it was the haphazard way in which the Foreign Ministry dealt with these relations that kept the Asian countries apart. A thorough perusal of the documents available in the Israel State Archives reveals that the Foreign Ministry did not adopt a systematic approach toward Asia. Attempts made by Israeli representatives to approach the countries in which they resided were often ignored and much was left to chance. Moreover, no attempt was made to treat Asia as a separate entity deserving special attention. For many years Asian and African affairs were handled by the same department in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. It was not until the mid-1980s that the Foreign Ministry started dealing with Asia as a separate unit and its officials began developing a systematic foreign policy toward Asia.

Throughout the entire period contacts between Israel and the Asian states were maintained in indirect ways. Unable to reach the Asian countries the Israeli Foreign Ministry resorted to quiet, behind the scenes, diplomacy. Israeli diplomats maintained

connections with their Asian counterparts in various locations throughout the world and in international fora. Intermediaries and mediators were often used in order to approach the Asian countries. For example, countries like Nepal and Australia were asked to help Israel approach Asian countries with large Muslim populations. Foreign dignitaries and businessmen were also involved in the process. However, contacts made by such individuals were not fully exploited and often came to an end after a single encounter. Though beneficial, such an approach produced only limited results.

The main factor allowing Israel to reach the Asian countries was its expertise in the technological field. Israel's ability to provide technical assistance to small countries in Asia enhanced its reputation and paved the way for better relations with the bigger states in the region. However, the Israelis did not manage to make full use of this extraordinary resource. Israel's involvement in Burma had demonstrated how the Israelis did not live up to their obligations and some officials had rightfully argued that Israel had missed an opportunity to show what could be done to help the Asian countries. Another factor which had an adverse effect on Israel's relations with the Asian countries was that Israeli companies and businessmen rarely coordinated their efforts to extend their enterprises in the Asian states with the Israeli government or with the officials of the Foreign Ministry. Moreover, they failed to develop long-range commercial plans which could benefit both sides. Motivated by the desire for a quick profit, Israeli entrepreneurs came to sell products or to provide services and quickly left. Besides, the Israelis had little regard for the local customs. They often displayed poor manners and thereby alienated their commercial partners in Asia.

Israel's relations with the states of Asia were also marred by the fact that its most experienced diplomats were sent to Western capitals. Unlike the capitals of the West those of Asia lacked luxurious facilities that could attract Israeli diplomats. Junior or inexperienced diplomats were often sent in order to promote relations with the Asian countries in which they resided, without substantial support in funds or trained personnel. This practice continued even in some of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Another factor which accounted for Israel's failure to attract the Asian countries was the rigidity of some of its high officials who insisted on reciprocity in their diplomatic contacts with the Asian countries. Israel had often insisted that opening a consulate in an Asian country was contingent on that country's agreement to open one in Israel. This often proved a serious handicap for some Asian countries, which did not wish to alienate the Arab countries by taking a step which they considered too flashy and too risky.

It was largely due to pragmatic considerations that the Asian countries preferred to keep a distance from Israel. Most Asian countries appreciated Israel's technical expertise and wished to benefit from it. At the same time, however, they sought to avoid alienating the Arab states, thereby forgoing the opportunity to benefit from Arab resources and votes in the United Nations. Rapprochement with Israel continued to be a delicate matter during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and China competed over influence in the countries of the Third World. Although the Asian countries were not anti-Semitic they were unfamiliar with the Jewish predicament prior to the formation of the State of Israel and therefore remained distant. Once Israel was established, the myth regarding the connection between Zionism and colonialism prevailed in Asia, thereby making the

rapprochement more difficult. Above all, however, it was the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict which kept Asia and Israel apart. The Arab-Israeli wars and the PLO's efforts to gain support in Asia had further delayed the rapprochement process.

The process of rapprochement between Israel and the Asian states gained momentum by the late 1980s, when the dialogue with the Palestinians began. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which left the United States as the sole global power, accelerated the process and many Asian countries, which hitherto had dealt with Israel in a covert manner, felt free to establish diplomatic relations with it. Although Israel managed to establish diplomatic relations with most Asian countries, the failure of the peace process still constitutes an insurmountable obstacle. Countries with large Muslim populations are still reluctant to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Yet even these countries see benefit in maintaining contact with Israel, whose technical expertise and contacts with Washington continue to weigh heavily in their decision-making. A thorough analysis of this topic proves that decisions made by the countries of Asia about improving their relations with Israel were based on pragmatic considerations, and their actions often contradicted their official statements. Although Israel managed to attract many countries, the road to full recognition by all Asian states is still strewn with obstacles. An analysis of the twists and turns of Israel's relations with the Asian states leads to the inevitable conclusion that the quest for acceptance will continue to depend on a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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