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THESIS

ISRAEL AND AN EMERGING WORLD ORDER

by

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ISRAEL AND AN EMERGING WORLD ORDER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	ISRAEL AND AN EMERGING WORLD ORDER.....	1
A.	IN SEARCH OF PARTNERS	1
B.	RELATIONS IN A NEW WORLD ORDER.....	3
C.	THE U.S.-ISRAELI SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP, SECURITY COOPERATION, AND TECHNOLOGY: TOOLS OF ISRAELI DIPLOMACY	4
D.	RISING POWERS' GROWING INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST	6
E.	A LENS FOR ASSESSING FUTURE ROLES IN THE REGION.....	8
II.	TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS: FRIENDS IN A FOXHOLE, COLD SHOULDER AT A PARTY.....	11
A.	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT: POST-COLD WAR RELATIONS.....	12
B.	DISTANCING IN THE 2000s.....	16
C.	“SUCCESSIVE CRISES”: FROM OPERATION CAST LEAD TO <i>MAVI MARMARA</i>	19
D.	A GROWING WEDGE IN RELATIONS: TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS	21
E.	THE RECENT THAW AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS: MARCH 2013–PRESENT	22
F.	CONCLUSION: THREAT PERCEPTIONS VERSUS REGIONAL INFLUENCE.....	25
III.	SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE.....	27
A.	CHINA'S INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST	28
B.	CHINA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST	31
C.	SINO-ISRAELI ARMS SALES	32
D.	THE U.S. VARIABLE IN SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS	35
E.	SINO-ISRAELI ECONOMIC RELATIONS.....	36
F.	THE ARAB SPRING: CHINA'S REACTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS.....	37
G.	ISRAEL AS A KEY TO REGIONAL STABILITY.....	41
H.	CONCLUSION: “FEELING FOR STONES”.....	44
IV.	INDO-ISRAELI RELATIONS: PARTNERS WITH CONSTRAINTS.....	47
A.	A DELAYED WARMTH REALIZED IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD.....	47
B.	INDIA'S INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST	50
C.	INDO-ISRAELI SECURITY COOPERATION	51
D.	INDO-ISRAELI ECONOMIC RELATIONS.....	56
E.	THE DOMESTIC FACTOR: THE CONVERSATION SHIFTS FROM EXISTENCE TO EXTENT	58
F.	INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: A SEARCH FOR BALANCE	60

G.	INDIA AND THE ARAB SPRING	63
H.	CONCLUSION: A GROWING PARTNERSHIP BUT NO ALLIANCE	64
V.	CONCLUSION: TIPPING THE BALANCE	67
A.	BALANCING DOMESTIC PRIORITIES WITH REGIONAL RELATIONS	68
B.	FACTORS DRIVING STRONGER RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL	69
C.	FACTORS TEMPERING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL	72
D.	REGIONAL STABILITY AND REGIONAL INFLUENCE	75
E.	NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PEACE	75
	LIST OF REFERENCES	77
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	85

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
AWACS	airborne early warning and control system
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Islamic State
LRTR	long range tracking radar
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
R&D	research and development
P5+1	five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
TechSAR	Israeli synthetic aperture radar reconnaissance satellite
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
XFAC	extra fast attack craft

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To my wife, Sarah, for making it all possible.

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I. ISRAEL AND AN EMERGING WORLD ORDER

A changing regional and international context is providing the impetus for Tel Aviv to develop partnerships beyond the U.S.-Israeli special relationship. For the United States, the lasting effects of two long and costly wars coupled with defense budget cuts and the intent to pivot forces to Asia will likely lead to more limited engagement in the Middle East. At the same time, emerging powers are becoming increasingly invested in the region. Turkey, India, and China are all rising powers whose involvement in the Middle East has grown in recent years. In the past decade, Turkey has shifted its Middle Eastern policy from a security-oriented approach that kept it isolated from Arab powers to one that emphasizes regional integration. Economic interests, primarily oil, have made India and China important regional players. All three of these states established official diplomatic relations with Israel at the end of the Cold War, but these relations have developed along different trajectories as factors unique to each of them have shaped the relationship. This thesis investigates the evolution of Israel's relationship with Turkey, India, and China since the end of the Cold War, focusing on how these emerging powers evaluate the factors driving closer cooperation with Israel and the factors that temper their relations.

A. IN SEARCH OF PARTNERS

Just like any other nation, Israel wishes to expand its trade to increase prosperity. Throughout the Cold War, ideological and bloc politics inhibited a number of nations from trading with the Jewish state. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, many powers have chosen to allow politics and trade to operate on independent trajectories, enabling Israel to expand its economic relations with countries that still remain rhetorically supportive of the Palestinian cause. For each of the three states considered, economic relations have blossomed over the past quarter century. Trade with each power was only a few hundred

million dollars at the end of the Cold War but has grown to \$4.4 billion, \$6 billion, and \$8 billion with Turkey, India, and China, respectively.¹

The export of high-end technology is particularly important for enabling Israel to meet some of its most pressing challenges. As a country that is dependent on the development of technology to address a number of its problems, from security to development, export markets help keep Israeli research and production competitive. In this respect, defense trade has strategic implications for Tel Aviv. Faced with threats on multiple fronts from powers that enjoy greater numbers, Israel has long relied upon a qualitative edge in defense technology to ensure its security. With a small domestic market, international arms sales enable the Israeli defense industry to remain commercially viable.

Israel also has a number of unique challenges that make its search for partners particularly critical. International forums have the potential to play a decisive role in determining the fate of some of the largest issues facing the country. Since the start of the 1990s, 14 out of 29 UN Security Council resolutions that involved a veto have been over issues regarding Israel. In each case, it was an American veto that prevented the resolution's passage.² Relations with states that have a substantial Muslim population, such as Turkey and India, help to dilute the religious aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and India has aspirations for gaining a permanent seat. Although all three powers continue to support the Palestinian cause in international forums, burgeoning trade and defense relations can help tone down anti-Israeli rhetoric and influence their future stances in these venues.

Apart from these reasons driving Israel to search for new partners, global changes that came in the wake of the Cold War enabled a number of powers to establish official diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.

¹ Soner Cagaptay and Tyler Evans, "The Unexpected Vitality of Turkish-Israeli Trade," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Research Notes*, no. 16 (June 2012): 1–2; "Export Import Data Bank 2012–2013," Indian Department of Commerce, accessed October 9, 2014, <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/iecnttopn.asp>; Yoram Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington: Israel's Technology Transfers to China," *Journal of East Asia Studies* 13, no. 3 (2013): 514.

² "Security Council- Veto List," United Nations Research Guides and Sources, accessed November 12, 2014, http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_en.shtml

B. RELATIONS IN A NEW WORLD ORDER

Israel was not destined to be a part of the U.S. orbit. A social democracy that had just won its independence from an imperial power would have been a prime candidate for membership in the non-alignment movement (NAM). Arab pressure prevented Israel's inclusion at the 1955 Bandung conference, at which the movement first took shape, and ruled out any subsequent involvement.³

As the Cold War came to dictate Israel's foreign relations, Washington's rivalry with Moscow fostered the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership that persists to this day. Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the United States offered tepid support to the newly independent state, but fear of driving Arab states into the arms of the Soviet Union, and a desire to preserve the delicate Arab-Israeli armistices with which the war ended, prevented the United States from offering any great level of support. It was not until the 1960s—when the Cold War battle lines in the Middle East hardened and support of Israel provided a means to defeat Soviet influence in the region—that the U.S.-Israeli special relationship began to evolve into what it is today. As a U.S. ally who faced hostile Arab states that wielded considerable leverage over oil supplies, Israel's foreign diplomacy was severely constrained by the Cold War environment.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had pervasive effects that opened the door for Israeli diplomacy. The loss of their superpower patron compelled Syria and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to participate in the 1991 Madrid Peace Process. Alongside them, Arab states sought a negotiated settlement with Israel, and the Arab political and economic boycott of the Jewish state eroded, enabling other powers to establish relations without any economic consequence or loss of credibility amongst the Arab powers. Between the Madrid Peace Process and the 1993 Oslo Accords, 29 states either reinvigorated or established official diplomatic ties with Israel. In the wake of the Oslo Accords, 36 countries undertook similar measures. Moderate Arab states and states that made up the former Soviet bloc were all part of these changes, as were Turkey, India,

³ Colin Shindler, "Introduction," in *Israel and the World Powers: Diplomatic Alliances and the International Relations beyond the Middle East*, ed. Colin Shindler (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014), 2.

and China. As previously hostile, regional countries established relations with Tel Aviv, these rising powers no longer stood to benefit from a policy of non-relations.⁴

C. THE U.S.-ISRAELI SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP, SECURITY COOPERATION, AND TECHNOLOGY: TOOLS OF ISRAELI DIPLOMACY

As a small state with a population under eight million, which is surrounded by hostile powers, and with whom cooperation has the potential to inflame Muslim opinion, Israel faces some challenges in its ability to reach out to international powers. It has been able to overcome those challenges through three primary tools: its reputation for influence in Washington, the provision of military-security assistance, and the export of high-end technology.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the U.S. unipolar moment, Israel's reputation for influence in Washington was an important factor in bringing many powers closer to Tel Aviv.⁵ While the amount of influence that Israel wields in U.S. domestic politics is debatable, third parties perception of this influence has driven many powers to draw closer to the Jewish state. For Turkey, the influence of the Israel lobby was seen as a means to neutralize the Greek and Armenian lobbies.⁶ For India, relations with Israel were established in part due to the need to secure U.S. support for help in dealing with its financial crisis.⁷

Israeli technological expertise and extensive combat experience make it a particularly appealing partner in security cooperation. Its advantages as an arms supplier are numerous. The Jewish state has extensive experience fighting Soviet weapons systems and integrating these platforms into their own arsenal. At the same time, Israel has access to western technology. Thus, Israel has the unique capability of being able to help powers upgrade their Soviet systems or incorporate western technology into their

⁴ P.R. Kumaraswamy, "At What Cost Israel-China Ties?" *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2006): 37–38.

⁵ Efraim Inbar, "The Indian-Israeli Entente," *Orbis* (Winter 2004): 91.

⁶ Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (June 1998): 20–21.

⁷ P. R. Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 239.

military. Since it does not sell platforms, but systems and subsystems, and is willing to allow for technology transfer, Israeli arms sales are conducive to helping build the defense industries of its trading partners.⁸ Moreover, due to its unique security environment, Israel has developed some niche capabilities in areas such as counter-terrorism, border security, and electronic surveillance that make it sought after by states facing similar threats.⁹

Israel does not make arms sales contingent on any peripheral issues, so it offers a means to procure western technology at times when other Western powers may be unwilling to sell it. This backdoor has been important for Turkey, India, and China. In the 1990s, Israel provided Turkey with the necessary military technology to prosecute the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency at a time when the United States and European Union (EU) blocked arms sales due to human rights concerns.¹⁰ For China, Israel's importance as an arms supplier became especially important when the West imposed sanctions following the Tiananmen Square massacre.¹¹ Similarly, New Delhi was compelled to increase its reliance on Israel after many powers restricted technology sales following India's 1998 Pokhran nuclear test.¹²

Defense cooperation, primarily in the form of arms sales, has helped Israel promote its diplomatic goals in a number of ways. In bringing together the leadership of the respective defense establishments, security cooperation fosters a mutual understanding of each country's threat environment and creates a degree of trust between respective military leaderships. At the very least, client states relying on Israel for some desirable technology or receiving Israeli assistance in coping with their own security challenges are more likely to act in Israel's interest by toning down their criticism of the

⁸ Yitzhak Shichor, "Israel's Military Transfers to China and Taiwan," *Survival* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 74.

⁹ Kumaraswamy, "At What Cost," 40–41.

¹⁰ Banu Eligur, "Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations (December 2008–June 2011): From Partnership to Enmity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 3 (2012): 430.

¹¹ Shichor, "Israel's Military Transfers," 74.

¹² Efraim Inbar and Alvite Singh Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century," *Middle East Security and Policy Studies* no. 93 (January 2012): 5.

Jewish state or foregoing arms sales to countries hostile to Israel.¹³ In each of the three cases considered, security cooperation provided the foundation for strengthening relations.

Israeli civilian technology has also proven to be a diplomatic asset. For powers that face similar development challenges as those of Israel—lack of water and other resources and a lack of arable land—Israeli technology in areas such as agriculture, water management, and renewable energy can help states overcome their development challenges. For example, drip irrigation has been an important part of Indo-Israeli trade, and Israel recently assisted with the construction of China’s first water desalination plant. Beyond development challenges, as rising powers seek to transition from relying solely on manufacturing to promote growth and wish to create an innovation base, Israeli technology provides a useful means in this transition. Moreover, Israel’s technological prowess makes its collaboration sought after in research and development projects. Israel is the only non-EU member that has been invited to take part in Europe’s \$100 billion research program, Horizon 2020.¹⁴

D. RISING POWERS’ GROWING INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

As a regional neighbor, Turkey’s relationship with Israel is constantly shaped by its relationship with the Arab states and its perception of threats to its own interests, arising from the domestic and international unrest that has long been endemic in the region. During the 1990s, when the Turkish military was able to sway Turkish foreign policy, an alliance with Israel provided a source of leverage over the neighbors the military perceived as threats.¹⁵ In the following decade, the structural reforms that came as a part of the EU accession process limited the military’s control over foreign policy.¹⁶

¹³ Evron, “Between Beijing and Washington,” 507.

¹⁴ Rory Miller, “Stock in Trade,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 25, 2014, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142112/rory-miller/stock-in-trade?cid=nlc-foreign_affairs_today-092614-stock_in_trade_5-092614&sp_mid=47065075&sp_rid=bWtkZWxvYWNAbnBzLmVkdQS2

¹⁵ Hasan Kosebalaban, “The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations: What is its Strategic Significance,” *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 46.

¹⁶ Kilic Bugra Kanat, “Theorizing the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 1 (2014): 65.

At the same time, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) sought a different approach to the region. The party rejected the security-oriented approach of the past and embraced a “zero problems with neighbors” policy, which emphasized enhanced economic relations with its neighbors and regional integration.¹⁷ Under this new policy, Turkey’s alliance with Israel became a liability as the leadership sought to exercise the tools of soft power to gain influence in the region. With the Arab Spring setting back Turkey’s attempts at regional integration and once again compelling a security-oriented approach, Turkish-Israeli relations have the potential to take on a renewed significance, but changes in Turkish domestic politics prevent relations from strengthening to the level they were in the 1990s.

India and China do not have the same immediacy of local threats affecting their relations with Israel, but both have growing economic interests in the Middle East. China recently surpassed the United States as the world’s largest importer of oil and currently gets over half of its oil from the Middle East, while the region supplies India with 60 percent of its oil imports.¹⁸ As economic growth and a burgeoning middle class compels a greater dependence on imports to meet their energy demands, their reliance on the region for oil will only grow more pronounced.

For both Asian powers, their relationship with Arab states continues to be primarily economic, and they have both sought a pragmatic, non-interventionist approach, which enables them to continue to increase economic relations with all powers, regardless of the political situation that may separate these regional powers from each other. Since their relationships with the Arab states are primarily based on trade, there is greater leeway in their ability to draw closer to Israel without disrupting relations with other Middle Eastern states. Any attempt to use economic leverage to compel these great powers to distance themselves from Israel would also produce self-inflicted wounds.

¹⁷ Ahmet Davutoglu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007,” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 80.

¹⁸ “EIA Country Report: China,” United States Energy Information Agency, last modified February 4, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=CH>; “EIA Country Report: India,” U.S. Energy Information Agency, last modified June 26, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=in>

The Asian powers also have interests unique to each of them that shape their involvement in the region. China continues to make considerable investments in the Middle East, totaling over \$70 billion to date.¹⁹ The future of these investments must be a part of China's calculus when responding to regional events. Also, it has been suggested that the Arab League is a central part of China's plans to foster a multipolar world.²⁰ Moreover, many parties within the region and within China itself are calling for Beijing to play a greater role in the Middle East beyond the passive, purely economically-driven path that it has advocated in the past. Whether this will involve cooperation in a U.S.-enforced order or take place under a different paradigm will have dramatic effects on the Sino-Israeli relationship.

India has a substantial number of its citizens—up to seven million expatriates by some accounts—working in the region.²¹ Concerns about the safety and livelihood of these expatriate workers and the economic contribution of these workers' remittances are New Delhi's immediate concerns when responding to regional events. Also, a considerable part of India's population is Muslim, and these voters' concerns influence the government's response to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Both of these factors inhibit New Delhi's ability to offer overt support to Tel Aviv.

E. A LENS FOR ASSESSING FUTURE ROLES IN THE REGION

The policies Ankara, New Delhi, and Beijing have adopted towards Tel Aviv tell a good deal about the larger role they envision themselves playing in the Middle East. Israel is a stable government in a volatile region. It has a strong military and unique intelligence and counter-terrorism capabilities. It is also an important producer of high-end technology for both military and civilian uses and continues to enjoy a close relationship with the United States. In all these respects, cooperation with Israel offers

¹⁹ "Map of China's Global Investments," The Heritage Foundation, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/projects/china-global-investment-tracker-interactive-map>

²⁰ *China and the Middle East: Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 113th Cong., 13 (2013) (statement of Dawn C. Murphy).

²¹ Shashank Joshi, "India's Isolationism: Why New Delhi Refuses to Engage the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142209/shashank-joshi/indias-isolationism>

significant tangible benefits, which can help these states in their ambitions to become great powers. Conversely, regional and domestic dynamics must be accounted for, which temper each of these three powers' openness towards Tel Aviv. The kinds of trade-offs that have governed Turkish, Chinese, and Indian relations with Israel in the past has been influenced by the need to balance the national goals of development, military modernization, and coping with particular security challenges against their other relations in the region, which, in turn, affect economic growth and the ability to promote a multipolar world. The weight that each power continues to give to the variables affecting relations with Israel will be telling of their future role in the region.

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II. TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS: FRIENDS IN A FOXHOLE, COLD SHOULDER AT A PARTY

In March 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to apologize for Israel's role in the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident. This incident—which resulted in the death of nine Turkish citizens when Israeli forces boarded a civilian ship enroute from Turkey to Gaza attempting to run the Israeli blockade—caused a sharp break in Turkish-Israeli relations. Although this crisis garnered much publicity, it really represented the acceleration of a decade-long trend of deteriorating relations.

Netanyahu's apology marked a new upswing in Turkish-Israeli relations, which have undergone four distinct phases since the end of the Cold War: strategic alignment (1994–2000), distancing (2000–2008), “successive crises” (2008–2013), and the recent thaw (2013–present).²² During the 1990s, agreements between the two militaries indicated a budding alignment between the region's two pro-Western democracies. These relations began to cool in the 2000s with a breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and regional changes brought by the Iraq War. Following the 2008 Israeli offensive into Gaza, Turkish-Israeli relations began to be characterized by successive crises, with the nadir in relations coming with the *Mavi Marmara* incident. In the past year, there has been some hope for a new warming of relations. Changes in the international, regional, and domestic contexts have combined to account for these changes in relations.

Undoubtedly, strong ties offer more for Israel than Turkey.²³ Israel has long been faced with regional isolation and stands to gain credibility from having strong relations with a Muslim nation, which would downplay the religious tones of the Arab-Israeli

²² Mesut Ozcan, “From Strategic Partnership to Successive Crises: Turkish-Israeli Relations in the 2000s,” in *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, ed. Ozden Zeynep Oktav (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011), 31.

²³ Efraim Inbar, “Israel's Strategic Relationship with Turkey and India,” in *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Security Policy, and Security Challenges*, ed. Robert O. Freedman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 230.

conflict.²⁴ Israel also can benefit from having Turkey as an arms market, in terms of economic cooperation in general, and from an alliance with a powerful regional partner who can help confront common threats.²⁵ These advantages notwithstanding, Israel stands to benefit more from a strategic alignment mainly because it has less to lose. Tel Aviv faces no major trade-off in drawing closer to Ankara. Cooperation with Turkey can only help improve Israel's relations with other regional powers. Changes in Turkish-Israeli relations over the past quarter century primarily stem from changes in how Turkey views their strategic environment and changes in Turkish domestic politics.

Turkey's shifting perception of Israel's utility as a strategic partner reflects the changing regional and international context that initially brought them together and later set them on divergent agendas. No less important, Turkish domestic politics has been a significant factor in shaping Turkish-Israeli relations. With the Middle East once again in a state of flux—in the wake of the Arab Spring and with the civil war in Syria creating new challenges for the region—the regional context has once again shifted to compel a thawing of relations between the two powers. These two nations' turbulent relationship reflects the dynamic nature of the region, and the current situation could once again provide the impetus for Turkey and Israel to become strategic partners.

A. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT: POST-COLD WAR RELATIONS

Turkey upgraded relations with Israel to ambassadorial level in 1991.²⁶ This development was part of a changing international environment. With the demise of the Soviet threat, Turkey was concerned that its importance as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally would be diminished. An alignment with Israel provided the means to demonstrate Turkey's continuing importance as a Western ally.²⁷ The end of the Cold War also altered Turkey's threat perception. Concerns about threats from the north

²⁴ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 430.

²⁵ Nimrod Goren, "An Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation: Israel and Turkey during the Arab Spring," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 2 (2012): 125, 128.

²⁶ Louis Fishman, "Turkish-Israeli Relations in a post-Arab Spring: A Historical Perspective," *Middle Eastern Analysis* 5, no. 50 (February 2013): 36.

²⁷ Dietrich Jung and Wolfgang Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 167.

diminished with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Turkey became concerned about threats emanating from its Middle Eastern neighbors.²⁸ The revision of the *National Security Policy Document* in 1992 demonstrated this shift in threat perception. The Kurdish insurgency was identified as the primary threat facing the state, followed by Syria, Iraq, and Iran, all known supporters of the insurgency.²⁹

Turkey's strategy at the time required maintaining the capability of fighting two and a half wars.³⁰ With tensions mounting between Greece and Turkey, problems with Turkey's Arab and Persian neighbors, and an ongoing insurgency, Turkey needed a strategic partnership. At the same time, in the wake of the Gulf War—when Ankara's European allies debated the possibility of defending Turkey should it come under attack from Saddam—Turkey questioned NATO's willingness to come to its aid in the event of regional conflict.³¹

Apart from these developments compelling a Turkish-Israeli alignment, there was also an erosion of factors that would have restrained this type of alignment in the past. Although this alignment was perceived by many Arab nations as having the potential to be offensive, the new international environment was more permissive of such an alliance.³² With the demise of the Soviet Union, surrounding Arab states lost a patron. No superpower was there to lead a counter-alliance that would have challenged the alignment of two pro-Western powers. The Gulf War demonstrated the fragmentation of Arab states and hegemony of the United States in the region, and with changes in the oil market, Arab states lost one of their key sources of leverage over Turkey.³³

²⁸ Ozlem Tur and Ahmet K. Han, "A Framework for Understanding the Changing Turkish Foreign Policy of the 2000s," in *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, ed. Ozden Zeynep Oktav (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011), 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 167.

³² Ofra Bengio and Gencer Ozcan, "Old Grievances and New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and its Alignment with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 2 (April 2001): 63, 68.

³³ *Ibid.*, 61, 63; Inbar, "Turkey and India," 227–228.

How the Turkish-Israeli alignment was perceived by Arab states demonstrated its potential strategic implications. Iraq was concerned about Turkey's increased military superiority coupled with its ambitions in Mosul. Saddam also feared that Israel would use Turkey's territory for surveillance or strikes into Iraq and feared the potential for a Turk-Kurd-Israeli alliance. Syria was concerned about an alliance between its neighbors on the north and south degrading its ability to negotiate with each of them from a position of leverage. Both allies maintained control over land Syria considered its own: Hatay in the north and Golan Heights in the south.³⁴

The Arab nations' threat perception was influenced by the international context in which a new balance of power was still being established. An alignment between the two most powerful militaries in the region, which were both pro-Western democracies and allies of the United States, was perceived as being at the expense of the Arab powers. The ineffectual response of the Arab nations demonstrated the permissive environment, which allowed for this alignment without significant repercussions. Turkish-Israeli alignment did not trigger a counter-alliance. Despite Arab threats about an alignment with Israel leading to the regional isolation of Turkey, this did not prove to be the case as many Arab nations actually drew closer to Turkey.³⁵ Finally, the alignment was successful in compelling Syria to capitulate to Turkey's demands.

Turkey and Israel's strategic partnership was signified by an increasing number of agreements between the two militaries, which began in 1994, and the most important of which, the *Military Training and Cooperation Agreement*, was signed in 1996.³⁶ The scope, depth, and openness of the 1996 agreements set it far apart from any previous cooperation between the two states.³⁷ These agreements entailed Turkey upgrading its military equipment with arms sales from Israel, Israeli pilots being permitted to use

³⁴ Bengio and Ozcan, "Old Grievances," 70–71.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁶ Nathalie Toccie and Joshua W. Walker, "From Confrontation to Engagement: Turkey and the Middle East," in *Turkey and It's Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*, ed. Ronald H. Linden et al. (London: Lynee Rienner Publishers, 2012), 41.

³⁷ Bengio and Ozcan, "Old Grievances," 68.

Turkish airspace for training, joint training and exercises conducted between the two forces, and intelligence sharing.³⁸

The ongoing Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency was the most immediate problem that the alignment was directed at tackling. The repercussions of the Gulf War increased the poignancy of the PKK threat inside of Turkey. The no-fly zone established by the U.S.-led Operation Provide Comfort in order to protect the Kurds in Northern Iraq—who had risen up against Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf War—resulted in Iraq's loss of effective control over its Kurdish territory, giving the Kurdish insurgency a base of operations to escalate their attacks against Turkey.³⁹

An alignment with Israel was an effective means for Turkey to prosecute the Kurdish insurgency. Arms sales from Israel provided Turkey with the necessary military technology to fight the insurgency at a time in which they were being blocked from U.S. and EU arms sales due to human rights concerns.⁴⁰ An alliance with Israel also provided a source of leverage against Damascus, which was giving logistical support to the PKK and harboring the PKK leader.⁴¹

The timing of the military agreements indicated the two main threats that the alignment was directed at confronting. Israel in the past had avoided condemning the PKK out of reluctance to make new enemies. With a change of leadership in 1996, Israel was willing to begin a joint counter-terrorism effort with Turkey and to condemn Syrian support of the PKK. The agreements also came at a time when Syria and Israel were approaching an agreement over peace negotiations. Turkey was concerned that a potential deal between the two powers would allow Syria to redeploy its troops stationed along the Golan Heights, putting pressure on Turkey to resolve disagreements over the territory of

³⁸ Inbar, "Turkey and India," 226–228; Toccie and Walker, "From Confrontation to Engagement," 41.

³⁹ Thomas Donnelly, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2004), 29; Hasan Kosebalaban, "Strategic Significance," 37.

⁴⁰ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 430.

⁴¹ Kosebalaban, "Strategic Significance," 46.

Hatay and the ongoing water dispute. An alignment with Israel gave Turkey the means to influence Israeli-Syrian peace talks.⁴²

The Turkish-Israeli alignment demonstrated its greatest strategic potential during the Turkish-Syrian crisis of 1998. Turkey deployed forces to the Syrian border and placed increasing pressure on Syria to quit its support of the PKK. Although Israel was not directly involved in the crisis, Syria interpreted Turkey's escalatory threats as a consequence of the Turkish-Israeli alignment. The crisis peacefully concluded with the Adana Agreements, in which Syria announced that it would cease support of the PKK, after 16 years of ignoring such demands.⁴³ Syria expelled PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who was subsequently captured at the Greek embassy in Kenya. These changes allowed the Turkish military to declare victory over the PKK in 1999.⁴⁴

In a way, the Turkish-Israeli alignment was a victim of its own success. The Adana Agreements began a rapprochement between Syria and Turkey and brought an end to the Kurdish insurgency, diminishing the primary impetus of the alignment.⁴⁵ The Adana Agreements also laid the foundation for further economic, military, and intelligence cooperation between Turkey and Syria.⁴⁶ Although cooperation between the Israeli and Turkish militaries would continue for another decade, the successful conclusion of the crisis with Syria removed one of the key reasons for the alignment and allowed Turkey to move beyond a foreign policy that was so security-oriented.⁴⁷

B. DISTANCING IN THE 2000s

The alliance continued into the twenty-first century, but changes in the regional context posed new challenges for Turkish-Israeli relations. The 2003 Iraq War created diverging visions for the future of the region and put the United States' two closest

⁴² Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 163, 169–170.

⁴³ Bengio and Ozcan, "Old Grievances," 77–78.

⁴⁴ Tur and Han, "Framework for Understanding," 15.

⁴⁵ İlker Aytürk, "The Coming of an Ice Age? Turkish–Israeli Relations Since 2002," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (December 2011): 676.

⁴⁶ Toccie and Walker, "From Confrontation to Engagement," 40.

⁴⁷ Tur and Han, "Framework for Understanding," 15.

regional allies at odds with each other. Israel was overwhelmingly in support of the war, while Turkey's leaders had to balance their role as a U.S. ally, concerns about the changing strategic environment, and a strong anti-U.S. domestic opinion.

Although the Kurdish threat was one of the initial building blocks of the Turkish-Israeli alignment, the context of the Iraq War set Israel and Turkey on different agendas vis-à-vis the Kurds. Ankara feared that the creation of a semi-autonomous Kurdish province in post-Saddam Iraq would result in a resurgence of the Kurdish insurgency, especially in a new environment that would not permit incursions into a U.S.-administered Iraq. These fears were confirmed when the PKK declared the end of a five year ceasefire in 2004.⁴⁸ While Turkey prepared to confront this resurgent threat, Israel was seen as a supporter of Kurdish autonomy in keeping with its desire for a fragmented Iraqi state as further assurance against future regional threats and as a means of putting pressure on Iran and Syria. Israeli military assistance to the Iraqi Kurds fed these concerns.⁴⁹ As relations between Israel and Turkey deteriorated later in the decade, suspicions in Turkey grew about a connection between Israel and the Kurdish insurgency. For many, these suspicions were later confirmed when the PKK attacked a naval base in Turkey on the same night that Israeli forces boarded the *Mavi Marmara*.⁵⁰ Turkey's leaders played upon this coincidence to feed anti-Israeli sentiment.⁵¹

The alignment managed to weather these key differences over the Iraq War, but the new regional context shifted Turkey's view of the strategic environment in a way that diverged from the U.S. and Israeli vision, primarily vis-à-vis Syria and Iran. The United States and Israel wanted to further isolate these two powers, while concerns about the independent Kurdish governance in Iraq aligned Syrian, Iranian, and Turkish threat perceptions, as all three powers faced an escalating Kurdish insurgency. At the same time, Turkey saw the United States as unwilling to aggressively pursue the PKK presence

⁴⁸ Kosebalaban, "Strategic Significance," 46.

⁴⁹ Inbar, "Turkey and India," 233; Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 431.

⁵⁰ Kosebalaban, "Strategic Significance," 47.

⁵¹ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 432.

in northern Iraq due to concerns about antagonizing the Kurdish population.⁵² As the number of PKK attacks in Turkey increased, Ankara sought other partners to help stem this growing insurgency.

The changing regional context brought Syria and Turkey closer together. The Iraq War drove Syria to seek further reconciliation and cooperation with Turkey. The overthrow of Saddam fed Syrian concerns about U.S. ambitions and pitted Syria between Israel and a U.S.-occupied Iraq. This new environment made closer relations with Turkey more important than ever. In light of these changes, Syria was finally willing to settle the issue of Hatay in 2004. Cooperation with Syria gave Turkey the means to diffuse rising tensions between the United States and Syria, fearing that further U.S. actions would bring more instability to the region. Cooperation with Syria also offered the opportunity for economic integration and allowed the neighbors to coordinate their policies towards the Kurdish insurgency.⁵³

Turkey's new approach to Syria represented a broader change in Turkey's foreign policy. Ahmet Davutoglu, who advocated this new policy as Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, asserted that Turkey should play a more active role in the region, fostering regional stability through economic interdependence, facilitating peace talks, and emphasizing a common identity and culture.⁵⁴ This new policy came to be characterized as the "zero problems with neighbors" approach, but beyond easing tensions, Turkey sought to facilitate regional integration and economic cooperation.⁵⁵ Under this new vision, Turkey would shape the strategic environment to prevent the need for such a security-oriented approach by playing the role of the mediator in disputes and building economic ties.

This shift away from a security-oriented approach came at the expense of Turkish-Israeli relations. Ankara advocated a different approach towards both Syria and

⁵² Ozden Zeynep Oktav, "Regionalism or Shift of Axis? Turkish-Syrian-Iranian Relations, in *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, ed. Ozden Zeynep Oktav (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011), 77–78, 83.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

⁵⁴ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 430–431.

⁵⁵ Davutoglu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," 80.

Iran that broke with the U.S. and Israel's hardline stance. Economic cooperation with both rogue states made Turkey more critical of policies intended to isolate them. Ankara grew increasingly critical of the policy of containment towards Iran, placing a greater emphasis on the need for diplomacy rather than further sanctions, which threatened to harm Turkey's economic interests.⁵⁶

Ankara's new foreign policy demonstrated a divergence of common interests and threat perceptions with Israel. Although these changes were not enough to lead to a hostile relationship between the two states, they demonstrated Turkey's new interpretation of its threat environment and approach towards it. Israel's and Turkey's diverging visions of the region set the background for future crises to erupt between the two powers.

C. "SUCCESSIVE CRISES": FROM OPERATION CAST LEAD TO MAVI MARMARA

Even though there was a cooling of relations at the beginning of the century, it was not until later in the decade when Turkish-Israeli relations would come to be characterized by successive crises. Turkish-Israeli relations were always subject to the context of the Arab-Israeli peace process. The Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s were a significant part of the permissive environment that enabled a Turkish-Israeli alignment. Promising developments in the peace process opened the door for Turkey to have increased engagement with Israel without a loss of credibility amongst the Arab nations.⁵⁷ In recent years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a catalyst for the unravelling of the alignment. The breakdown in the peace process at the start of the century and the ensuing Second Intifada placed strains on the alignment.

A number of other incidents established mounting tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations, particularly Turkey's relationship with Hamas. Prime Minister Erdogan

⁵⁶ Oktav, "Regionalism," 84–85; Efraim Inbar, "Israeli-Turkish Tensions and Their International Ramifications," *Orbis* (Winter 2011): 138.

⁵⁷ Toccie and Walker, "From Confrontation to Engagement," 48; Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 166.

acknowledged the legitimacy of Hamas as a political organization following their 2006 electoral victory in Gaza and hosted a Hamas delegation.⁵⁸

Turkey's increasing pro-Palestinian stance was part of its new approach to gaining regional influence. Anti-Israeli rhetoric was useful in garnering public support, domestically as well as with the Arab street at large. While an increasingly vocal pro-Palestinian stance created strains between Ankara and Tel Aviv, the first major crisis in relations did not come until Operation Cast Lead, the 2008 offensive Israel launched into Gaza in response to repeated rocket attacks and the expiration of a cease-fire with Hamas.⁵⁹ The timing and scale of the offensive placed strains on Turkish-Israeli relations. The operation was launched while Turkey was mediating peace talks between Syria and Israel. The Gaza offensive subverted the peace talks, and Turkey's leaders condemned Israel's disproportionate use of force.⁶⁰

Operation Cast Lead led to further diplomatic crises between the two states. Most famously, at the 2009 Davos Summit, Prime Minister Erdogan publicly confronted Israeli President Peres about the Gaza offensive and accused him of crimes against humanity.⁶¹ Turkish-Israeli relations continued on this downhill slope. Turkey disinvited Israel from participating in Operation Anatolian Eagle in 2009, ending over a decade of military cooperation.⁶²

The 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident was the culmination of this downward trend in Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkey's initial reaction to the incident was severe. Diplomatic relations were downgraded, a series of sanctions against Israel were imposed, and Turkey threatened to escalate the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean by having naval vessels escort future attempts at breaking the blockade of Gaza.⁶³ Turkey demanded an end to the

⁵⁸ Toccie and Walker, "From Confrontation to Engagement," 43.

⁵⁹ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 435.

⁶⁰ Kosebalaban, "Strategic Significance," 38.

⁶¹ Ibid.; "Erdogan Speaks against Peres at Davos," YouTube video, 2:19, posted by "soldiercan," January 29, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHZusFgq3QU>

⁶² Aytürk, "Coming of an Ice Age," 678; Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 433.

⁶³ Goren, "Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation," 130.

blockade of the Gaza Strip, a public apology, and compensation to the victims' families in order to restore diplomatic relations.⁶⁴ Israel's reluctance to meet these demands stemmed from domestic political reasons and a prevailing belief that Turkish-Israeli relations would continue to deteriorate regardless of whether or not these demands were met.⁶⁵

The *Mavi Marmara* incident has been characterized as the Turkish government using a humanitarian mission to escalate tensions with Israel in order to create a justification for dismantling the strategic partnership.⁶⁶ Whether or not this was the intended outcome, Ankara's acquiescence in allowing a non-governmental organization (NGO) to sail from Turkey's waters with the intention of breaking the Gaza blockade and Israel's heavy-headed response altered Turkey's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from being a pro-Palestinian third party to being directly engaged in hostilities.⁶⁷ The *Mavi Marmara* incident also demonstrated that Turkey's policy towards Israel had come a full 180 degrees since the 1990s: from being willing to face regional isolation for a strategic alignment with Israel to risking open hostility with Israel for regional influence.

D. A GROWING WEDGE IN RELATIONS: TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS

As important as the international and regional contexts have been in shaping Turkish-Israeli relations, Turkish domestic politics has also had a strong influence on its relationship with Israel. In the 1990s, the military was the most influential body in shaping foreign policy. An alignment was Israel part of the military's security-oriented approach towards foreign policy. At the same time, the Turkish military, which has long seen itself as the guardian of Ataturk's secular republic, saw a Turkish-Israeli alignment

⁶⁴ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 447.

⁶⁵ Goren, "Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation," 128–129.

⁶⁶ Eligur, "Crisis in Relations," 447.

⁶⁷ Aytürk, "Coming of an Ice Age," 679.

as a means to demonstrate the continuing secular nature of the republic at a time when Islamist parties were gaining ground inside of Turkey.⁶⁸

The European Union accession process and the election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 created important changes in domestic politics that challenged Turkish-Israeli relations. The victory of the AKP introduced a single party government after years of weak coalition governments. Reforms introduced by the AKP as part of the EU accession process resulted in a further democratization of the country and decreased the military's influence on foreign policy.⁶⁹

Along with these structural changes, the influence of public opinion—which is decidedly anti-Israeli in Turkey—on the formulation of foreign policy has grown. The new power of public opinion was demonstrated at the outset of the 2003 Iraq War. Public pressure compelled the Turkish parliament to vote against allowing the United States to use Turkish territory to open up a northern front during the invasion.⁷⁰ These domestic changes have created a wedge between Turkey and Israel that will undoubtedly prevent any type of future alignment from approximating the “honeymoon” period of the 1990s.⁷¹

E. THE RECENT THAW AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS: MARCH 2013–PRESENT

Israel's apology regarding the *Mavi Marmara* incident and Turkey's willingness to restore relations without their demands fully met indicate that the regional context has once again shifted to create a convergence of Turkish and Israeli interests. The main development shaping this new stage in Turkish-Israeli relations is the civil war in Syria, which has created new threats for both Israel and Turkey. Netanyahu publicly acknowledged that the motivation behind the apology was the need to work together to confront problems in Syria. With the advent of chemical weapons into the fight,

⁶⁸ Kosebalaban, “Strategic Significance,” 42; Matthew S. Cohen and Charles D. Freilich, “Breakdown and Possible Restart: Turkish-Israeli Relations under the AKP,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2014): 45.

⁶⁹ Kanat, “Theorizing,” 65.

⁷⁰ Kanat, “Theorizing,” 74.

⁷¹ Goren, “Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation,” 134.

increased incidents of spillover in both countries, and growing regional instability, Turkey and Israel both serve to benefit from coordinating how they address threats emanating from Syria.⁷² At the very least, both face the threat of terrorist organizations launching attacks out of this environment. Israel has better intelligence on developments, which Turkey needs to address this ever-shifting situation.⁷³

The broader context of the Arab Spring also set back Turkey's policy of regional integration, with some joking that Turkey may be forced to abandon its "zero problems with neighbors" policy when there is zero neighbors to have problems with.⁷⁴ Turkey's early support of the protestors was seen as threatening by many of the Arab states: Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states.⁷⁵ Turkey's support of the Muslim Brotherhood and criticism of the military coup has left it at odds with the Egyptian government.⁷⁶ The Arab Spring also brought the loss of Assad as an ally, and pitted Iran and Turkey on opposing sides of a proxy war in Syria. In short, changes in the regional context in the wake of the Arab Spring forced Turkey to temporarily abandon its policy of regional integration and once again adopt a security-oriented approach.

Threats emanating from Syria providing the impetus for a strategic alignment between Turkey and Israel is reminiscent of the 1990s, but much has changed that prevents the alignment from returning to this past level of cooperation. Turkish domestic politics has given anti-Israeli parties a greater voice. Although the Arab Spring set back Turkey's aims at regional integration, an alignment with Israel is still an obstacle to implementing this policy if the situation changes to once again support Turkey's vision of regional normalization. Recently, there have been indications that Turkey is trying to

⁷² Semih Idiz, "Israeli Apology May Restore Turkey's Regional Influence," *al-Monitor*, March 26, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/turkey-israel-apology-threatens-syria-iran.html#>

⁷³ Michael J. Koplow, "Why Israel and Turkey Got Back Together: The Coming Cooperation on Syria and Energy," *Foreign Affairs*, March 23, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139076/michael-j-koplow/why-israel-and-turkey-got-back-together>

⁷⁴ Gallia Lindenstrauss and Yaniv Avraham, "Is Turkey Returning to the 'Zero Problems' Policy?" *INSS Insight*, no. 503 (December 30, 2013): 1.

⁷⁵ Alexander Murinson, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 97 (September 2012): 18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Lindenstrauss and Avraham, "Turkey Returning to 'Zero Problems,'" 3.

return to their policy of “zero problems” by resolving differences and increasing cooperation with both Iraq and Iran.⁷⁷

One consistent factor in Turkish-Israeli relations has been trade. Ankara’s continual emphasis on building economic ties in the region has applied to Israel as well. Despite the turmoil in diplomatic relations, trade between the two has continued to grow.⁷⁸ Even in the aftermath of the *Mavi Marmara* incident, trade grew 30 percent.⁷⁹ Israel’s recent discovery of offshore natural gas fields offers the potential for further economic cooperation between the two powers. Turkey could serve as a market and hub for Israel’s energy trade, which would help lessen Turkey’s dependence on Russia and Iran to meet its energy demands.⁸⁰ These economic ties could provide a foundation for building stronger relations, but economic cooperation and diplomatic relations have operated largely independent of each other in the past.

Currently, Turkey and Israel benefit from closer relations because they share common security problems emanating out of Syria. However, as the situation develops, common threats will not necessarily translate into common opportunities. If Turkey is no longer forced to react to growing threats but instead has the power to once again implement a policy of regional integration, then an alignment with Israel will be a liability. A number of variables could influence the future of Turkish-Israeli relations: the U.S. role in the region, the outcome in Syria, the ongoing Kurdish insurgency, Iran’s nuclear program, the future of Iraq, and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Although innumerable variables make it difficult to predict the future of Turkish-Israeli relations, the past quarter century suggests that rising threat perceptions will compel Turkey to draw closer to Israel, while in a more benign environment Ankara will wish to keep Tel Aviv at a distance.

⁷⁷ Lindenstrauss and Avraham, “Turkey Returning to ‘Zero Problems,’” 2.

⁷⁸ Ozlem Tur, “Economic Relations with the Middle East Under the AKP—Trade, Business Community and Reintegration with Neighboring Zones,” *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (December 2011): 597–598.

⁷⁹ Can Kasapoglu, “The Turkish-Israeli Relations in 2013: Modest Expectations,” *Middle Eastern Analysis* 5, no. 49 (January 2013): 12.

⁸⁰ Koplou, “Why Israel and Turkey Got Back Together.”

F. CONCLUSION: THREAT PERCEPTIONS VERSUS REGIONAL INFLUENCE

For Turkey, relations with Israel require a constant balancing act. An alignment with Israel is useful for confronting immediate threats but inhibits Turkey from shaping the region to ensure security and stability in the long-term. When there is an external threat challenging Turkey's security, relations with Israel may become necessary to outweigh the regional and domestic benefits of maintaining a strong rhetoric against Israel. However, both regional dynamics and Turkey's domestic politics continue to evolve to adjust how much weight each factor has.

In sum, the complexity of Turkish-Israeli relations reflects the complexity of the regional environment that gives shape to them. A continually volatile region shapes Turkey's foreign policy. As the strategic environment changes to induce a security-oriented approach and Ankara's level of threat perception increases, an alignment with Israel provides a means to address common threats. Conversely, barring any change in the peace process, an alignment with Israel inhibits Turkey from exerting influence and shaping the regional environment through the tools of soft power: regional integration, economic cooperation, and mediation. Still, even in this more benign environment a minimum level of relations is necessary for Turkey to be able to play the role of mediator between Israel and other Arab powers.⁸¹ Allowing relations to deteriorate to a level of hostilities is in neither state's interest.

⁸¹ Goren, "Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation," 125.

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III. SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Since the end of the Cold War, China's involvement in the Middle East has grown exponentially. The region is important to China primarily for economic reasons, as a source of oil and growing market for exports, but as Beijing becomes increasingly invested in the region, involvement will inevitably extend beyond economic ties. Although China has advocated and demonstrated a non-interventionist approach as a part of its rise, the more it becomes invested in different regions, the more potential it has to get drawn into regional politics. So far, China's pragmatic approach has extended to Arab-Israeli hostilities. Consistent with China's policy of non-interference, Beijing has avoided taking any firm stance that would risk alienating one side. Many parties are now pushing for China to play a more active role in the region, and there are indications that China is finding it increasingly necessary to do so. Any increased political involvement will make it necessary for China to establish what its relations with Israel will be beyond economic ties.

In 1992, China opened up official relations with Israel. One year later, China became a net importer of oil, with Middle Eastern states playing a steadily increasing role in accounting for these imports.⁸² The foundation of both of these relationships remains economic. Israel has gone from being an important source of military technology to an important source of other high-end technologies. Despite U.S. pressure effectively bringing an end to Sino-Israeli arms sales, economic ties between Israel and China have continued to grow. Still, China's ties with the region's oil producing states have created tension in its regional policy. The same forum China set up to foster economic cooperation in the region are venues Arab states use to pressure China to take a more active part in addressing Arab-Israeli hostilities.

As China moves from a policy of non-interference to one of increased involvement, Sino-Israeli ties will undoubtedly be affected. In this light, Sino-Israeli

⁸² John B. Alterman and John W. Garver, *Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Center for International and Strategic Studies, 2008), 21.

relations are an appropriate lens for discerning China's future role in the Middle East. Beijing's relationship with Tel Aviv will be influenced for better or worse by whatever form increased involvement takes on. If China continues to pursue a policy of economic cooperation with all parties and seeks to remain disengaged from political issues, then economic ties with Israel will continue to grow as they have in the past without significant political or military cooperation. However, if China takes steps to shape the region to best protect its interests, then China will be faced with a choice of isolating Israel or fostering closer ties at the risk of antagonizing other regional actors.

China's relationship with Israel is dominated by the need to balance a number of factors. On the one hand are factors limiting ties: a dependence on Middle Eastern oil and the desire to present an alternative to U.S. hegemony in the region. On the other side are factors that could enhance Sino-Israeli cooperation: a desire to play a greater role in the region while avoiding open confrontation with the United States and the appeal of Israeli high-end technology for both its military and civilian sector. Playing a constructive role in the regional peace process and ensuring regional stability are broader objectives that could either strengthen or weaken Sino-Israeli relations depending on a changing regional context and China's vision of the best way to realize these goals.

A. CHINA'S INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

China's involvement in the Middle East is a case of domestic growth directly driving international involvement, and all foreign relations must be seen through the lens of how they will directly or indirectly impact China domestically. The Middle East's primary importance is directly related to China's domestic stability. Middle Eastern oil and developing markets feed the economic growth that domestic stability has come to rely on. Separately, relations with Israel and Muslim nations also must be seen within the context of the separatist threat China faces within its own Muslim population.⁸³

⁸³ *Hearing before the Commission* (statement of Murphy), 13.

As the world's largest consumer of energy, China has become increasingly reliant on oil imports.⁸⁴ China did not become a net importer of oil until 1993.⁸⁵ Although China has sought to fill this need by diversifying its oil supply, an increasing amount of China's oil imports comes from the Middle East. Currently, China gets half of its oil imports from the region, and this number is anticipated to increase to 70 percent by 2020.⁸⁶ The importance of Middle Eastern oil for fueling China's continued growth cannot be overstated.

Between 2005 and 2012, trade between China and the Middle East doubled, and, in 2010, China surpassed the United States as the region's largest trading partner. As part of this new economic interdependence, Chinese has invested approximately \$70 billion in the region.⁸⁷ Most of these investments are concentrated in the energy sector, indicative of China's growing dependence on Middle Eastern oil.⁸⁸

Beyond oil, the Middle East is important for a number of other economic reasons. The region serves as an important market for product exports, the regional sales of which reached \$121 billion in 2012, and for service exports, with Chinese construction services in the Middle East accounting for \$21 billion.⁸⁹ The Middle East's location also makes it relevant in facilitating trade between China and Europe. China is Europe's largest trading partner. Trade between the two reached \$567 billion in 2011, as compared to U.S.-European trade at \$446 billion.⁹⁰ China's investment in the Red Sea Land Bridge, which will allow for the shipment of goods through Israel as an alternative to the Suez Canal, indicates the importance of the location of the Middle East in facilitating trade with Europe.

⁸⁴ Abbas Varij Kazemi and Xiangming Chen, "China and the Middle East: More than Oil," *European Financial Review*, February 21, 2014, <http://www.europeanfinancialreview.com/?p=7839>

⁸⁵ Alterman and Garver, *Vital Triangle*, 21.

⁸⁶ "EIA Country Report: China"; Kazemi and Chen, "More than Oil."

⁸⁷ "Map of China's Global Investments."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Hearing before the Commission* (statement of Murphy), 7.

⁹⁰ *Hearing before the Commission* (statement of Bryant Edwards), 62.

China's growing international influence has been accompanied by a desire and met with an expectation for China to offer an alternative to U.S. influence in the region. Middle Eastern nations are a part of China's vision for a fostering a multipolar world order through South-South cooperation as an alternative to the U.S.-dominated system.⁹¹ The Chinese Arab States Cooperation Forum, established in 2004 and made-up of 21 Arab states, is one of the primary ways China pursues this goal in the region. The focus of this forum is economic cooperation and political coordination. One of its foundations is support for Arab political causes, especially pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹² China walks a fine line between exploiting regional hostilities for its own benefit, particularly in the case of Sino-Iranian relations, and avoiding undermining the United States' regional influence due to its dependence on U.S. hegemony for maintaining regional stability.

While the portion of Middle Eastern oil that makes up Chinese imports points to China's growing dependence on Middle Eastern nations, China has also taken significant steps to ensure these relationships are better characterized as a sort of "mutual dependence."⁹³ China's economic interests in the region should not be overemphasized to imply a lack of autonomy in formulating a regional policy. Beijing has sought to make oil producers dependent on it by offering political support, through China's role on the UN Security Council and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), by increasing exports to the region, and by making investments within these states.⁹⁴ This is a critical point with regards to Sino-Israeli relations. Although China is becoming increasingly reliant on Middle Eastern oil, this need not translate to Arab states having an inordinate degree of leverage over China's regional policy.

⁹¹ *Hearing before the Commission*, 7–8 (statement of Murphy).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁹³ *Hearing before the Commission*, 31 (statement of Yitzhak Shichor).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

B. CHINA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST

With China's interests in the region being overwhelmingly economic, China has tended to adopt a "pragmatic, non-interventionist" approach towards regional issues.⁹⁵ Primarily concerned with regional stability and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of energy, China has attempted to maintain a neutral stance towards many of the contentious regional issues.⁹⁶ China's policy of non-interference has shaped China's relations to most Middle Eastern powers, and Sino-Israeli relations have been consistent with this pattern. Trade with Israel has continued to grow alongside trade with the region at large.

As China's economic cooperation with Middle Eastern states increases, and with it regional influence, maintaining this neutral approach will become more challenging. Arab states want China to adopt a pro-Palestinian stance and are placing increasing pressure for it to do so. For example, at the China-Arab Cooperation Forum in 2010, China resisted Arab pressure and refused to sign a document recognizing Eastern Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.⁹⁷ There are indications that this deliberately passive stance is changing. In 2013, China's president laid out his framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace, identifying East Jerusalem as the rightful capital of a sovereign Palestine.⁹⁸

Growing economic interests and a shifting regional context have driven some within China to call for a reevaluation of its regional policy. In 2012, one influential Chinese scholar advocated for a policy of greater activism in West Asia, dubbed "Marching Westwards."⁹⁹ The rationale behind this policy is based on a number of points: China's growing economic interests in the region, the region's lack of a military

⁹⁵ Kazemi and Chen, "More than Oil."

⁹⁶ Alterman and Garver, *Vital Triangle*, 8.

⁹⁷ "China Refuses to Support Arab Claims over East Jerusalem," *Al Jazeera TV*, May 14, 2010, <http://www.webcitation.org/5xRt7hIDh>

⁹⁸ "Chinese President Makes Four-Point Proposal for Settlement of Palestinian Question," *Xinhua*, May 6, 2013, <http://english.people.com.cn/90883/8234101.html>

⁹⁹ Wang Jisi, "'Marching Westwards': The Rebalancing of China's Geostrategy," *International and Strategic Studies Report*, no. 73 (2012): 1; Yun Sun, "March Westwards: China's Response to the U.S. Rebalancing," *Brookings Institute*, January 21, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/01/31-china-us-sun>

alliance or regime of economic integration that could be used to block China's influence, the need to develop China's western provinces as they lag behind the eastern provinces, and a response to the U.S. pivot to Asia.¹⁰⁰ This final point rests on the perception that as the United States rebalances towards the Pacific, there is a growing threat of confrontation with the United States in East Asia, while West Asia offers the potential for cooperation between the two superpowers. "Marching westwards" necessitates playing the role of a great power, including "promoting the creation of multilateral security mechanisms and the peaceful solution of regional conflicts."¹⁰¹ Many Chinese officials have also been calling for a more proactive policy in the region under different paradigms.¹⁰²

In addition to these policy recommendations, the Arab Spring altered the regional context and compelled China to reassess its role in the Middle East. The Arab Spring caught the Chinese largely off guard, and with the fall of Qaddafi, China lost over \$20 billion in investments in Libya.¹⁰³ The United States' tepid response to these regional developments coupled with the fall of authoritarian regimes called U.S. influence into question and demonstrated that the mechanisms that once ensured regional stability could no longer be counted on, driving many in Beijing to reexamine its regional involvement.¹⁰⁴

C. SINO-ISRAELI ARMS SALES

Even before the establishment of official Sino-Israeli relations, arms sales provided the basis for their cooperation and, later, remained an important driver in the evolution of the relationship. During the 1980s and 1990s, China acquired some much-

¹⁰⁰ Jisi, "Marching Westwards," 1–11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹⁰² Christina Lin, "China's Strategic Shift toward the Region of the Four Seas: The Middle Kingdom Arrives in the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 41–42; Carice Witte, "A Quiet Transformation in China's Approach to Israel," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, April 1, 2012, <http://jcpa.org/article/a-quiet-transformation-in-chinas-approach-to-israel/>

¹⁰³ Jisi, "Marching Westwards," 9.

¹⁰⁴ Yoram Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations: In Search of Common Strategic Ground," in *China and International Security: History, Strategy, and 21st Century Policy*, ed. Donovan C. Chau and Thomas M. Kane (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 250.

desired military technology through Israel. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States, sensitive to China as a growing rival, placed obstacles to further Sino-Israeli arms sales.¹⁰⁵ Although defense relations have waned, Israel's economic importance to China persists, especially in terms of high-end technology. Despite U.S. obstruction to the arms sales, peaceful U.S.-Sino ties also continue to be a significant factor in China's relationship with Israel.

Historically, defense trade has been one of Israel's primary tools of diplomacy, used to promote its security and political interests in addition to providing economic benefits. Lacking other tools of diplomacy, military trade has been used by Israel to further relations with states who share common enemies, to serve as a basis for further military-to-military engagement, and to gain some influence over the behavior of client states.¹⁰⁶ Arms sales to China were important to Israel primarily because of its lucrative arms market, but they also served as a foundation to build diplomatic relations and provided a potential source of leverage over Chinese arms sales to hostile Middle Eastern states. This final motivation has been pointed to by some scholars as justification for reinvigorating defense trade relations, particularly following the strike on an Israeli corvette by a Hezbollah-fired, Chinese-made C-802 missile in the 2006 Lebanon War.¹⁰⁷

The Sino-Vietnamese border clashes of 1979 made apparent the need for China's military modernization, and throughout the following decade, Israeli arms sales played an important role in achieving this goal.¹⁰⁸ The advantages Israel offered as an arms supplier were numerous. Israel had access to Western technology and a lot of experience fighting Soviet weapons and integrating them into their own forces, so Israeli arms suppliers were capable of upgrading the Soviet-based technology that made up most of China's military equipment. Unlike NATO allies, Israel did not face significant external restrictions on its arms sales and did not tie arms sales to conditions such as human rights. Israel was

¹⁰⁵ P. R. Kumaraswamy, "China, Israel and the US: The Problematic Triangle," *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013): 151.

¹⁰⁶ Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington," 506–507.

¹⁰⁷ Kumaraswamy, "Problematic Triangle," 147.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

willing to sell technology without requiring the purchase of fully constructed equipment, which would have inhibited the growth of China's domestic defense industry.¹⁰⁹ Also, since the two states had not yet established formal relations, these arms sales were shrouded in secrecy, preventing any damage to relations with China's Arab friends.¹¹⁰ In the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, Israeli arms sales increased in importance with the imposition of Western sanctions on China. Israel provided a "back door" to Western technology, and arms sales helped pave the way for the establishment of official relations."¹¹¹

Although the changes brought by the end of the Cold War provided the impetus for the establishment of official relations, the new international context also shaped the United States' view of military trade between Israel and China. With the demise of the Soviet Union, Washington began to see Beijing as a potential rival and became concerned with the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific. Within this context, a number of controversies arose with Israel's continued sale of high-end military technology to China, particularly technology that the United States saw as having the potential for upsetting the strategic balance in the Taiwan Strait.¹¹²

The U.S. accusation of the illegal transfer of Patriot anti-missile defense technology and Lavi jet technology indicated the U.S. growing concern with Israeli transfers to China. This concern became more acute with the Phalcon and Harpy controversies. In July 2000, U.S. pressure forced Israel to break a contract with China for the provision of the Phalcon AWACS. This breach in contract and U.S. interference was a significant setback in Sino-Israeli arms sales. Subsequently, the crisis in 2004 over Israel upgrading China's Harpy UAVs produced dramatic changes in Sino-Israeli arms sales. Although Tel Aviv claimed it was only contracted to do maintenance work on the UAVs, Washington was concerned that this actually entailed an upgrade and demanded

¹⁰⁹ Shichor, "Israel's Military Transfers," 74.

¹¹⁰ Kumaraswamy, "Problematic Triangle," 148.

¹¹¹ Kumaraswamy, "Israel-China Relations and the Phalcon Controversy," *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 93–94.

¹¹² Kumaraswamy, "Problematic Triangle," 151–152.

that Israel not return the UAVs. Following this incident, the United States required Israel to suspend future defense sales to China and demanded approval over any future Israeli military or dual-use technology sales to China. This incident effectively brought an end to Sino-Israeli arms sales and has produced a setback in defense relations that the two powers are still trying to overcome.¹¹³

China continues to call for Israel to reevaluate its current approach to technology transfers, and as China's interest and role in the region continues to grow, Israel may feel compelled to do so.¹¹⁴ P.R. Kumaraswamy points to a number of developments in the past decade that make a resumption of arms sales likely: an erosion of U.S. political and economic influence coupled with a rise in Chinese economic and political influence; a militarization of Israeli policy that accentuates the need for a qualitative military edge, with export markets serving as a means to maintain a competitive defense sector; Israel's lack of other tools of diplomacy, especially with the relevancy of influence over Washington waning; and with China's greater activism in the Middle East, a growing need to influence China's regional policies.¹¹⁵

D. THE U.S. VARIABLE IN SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS

The United States is the primary variable that determines the nature of Sino-Israeli relations. Israel's special relationship with the United States poses challenges and opportunities for Sino-Israeli ties. On one hand, Washington's leverage over Israel put an end to Sino-Israeli arms sales, which were the initial factor in forging relations and offered the potential for further integration of defense establishments. Washington still stands as an obstacle to defense ties with the controls it placed over Israeli military exports to China. These stringent restrictions, along with China's growing influence in the region, have led to calls for a reevaluation of this control mechanism.¹¹⁶ Seen in this light, U.S.-Israeli ties present a formidable obstacle to the deepening of Sino-Israeli ties.

¹¹³ Ibid.; Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington," 511–512.

¹¹⁴ Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington," 521.

¹¹⁵ Kumaraswamy, "Problematic Triangle," 155–157.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Yet, Israel's special relationship with the United States makes Israel appealing as a regional partner. Enhancing ties with Israel is a means to gain influence over regional issues while avoiding an open confrontation with the United States; although, the U.S. variable in the relationship is dependent on the strength of U.S.-Israeli ties and the level of support Washington continues to offer its partner.¹¹⁷ Resuming arms sales that would likely antagonize the United States could undermine one of Israel's greatest sources of appeal. For the time being, leveraging arms sales or emphasizing the U.S.-Israeli special relationship are two mutually exclusive alternatives to enhancing relations with China.

E. SINO-ISRAELI ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Before the Phalcon and Harpy controversies, arms sales provided a strong basis for Sino-Israeli relations, but U.S. interference altered the nature of the sales and Sino-Israeli relations. China's perception of the influence Israel wielded over Washington was dispelled, and Israel lost an important source of leverage over Chinese military sales to the Middle East.¹¹⁸ Despite Israeli concerns, Beijing blamed Washington for the cancellation of these two deals. Even with the absence of arms sales, Sino-Israeli trade has continued to grow.¹¹⁹ Trade increased from just under \$1 billion in 2000 to \$8 billion in 2012, including tripling in the wake of the Harpy controversy. China now ranks as Israel's second largest trading partner.¹²⁰

China continues to see Israel as a key source of advanced technology. Israel is at the fore-front of technologies China desperately needs to sustain its development: renewable energy; energy conservation; water conservation, in terms of desalination and water-saving irrigation; and agro-chemicals.¹²¹ Israel's high-end technology will only grow in importance as China attempts to transform its economy. In 2011, Beijing released a five-year plan that announced the intention for the state to become an

¹¹⁷ Yiyi Chen, "China's Relationship with Israel, Opportunities and Challenges: Perspective from China," *Israel Studies* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 12.

¹¹⁸ Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington," 513.

¹¹⁹ Kumaraswamy, "Problematic Triangle," 154.

¹²⁰ Evron, "Between Beijing and Washington," 514.

¹²¹ Binyamin Tjong-Alvares, "The Geography of Sino-Israel relations," *Jewish Political Reviews Studies* 24 (2012): 113-114.

innovator of goods, rather than just a manufacturer. Cooperation with Israel offers a key means to achieve this goal. Apart from trade in goods, Israel and China have also deliberately fostered academic, cultural, and research ties in recent years.¹²²

Chinese investment is also a growing part of these bilateral relations. In 2011, China purchased the majority share of an Israeli agricultural chemical company for \$1.44 billion and has invested another half a billion dollars in other Israeli technologies.¹²³ China also recently signed a deal for a \$4 billion infrastructure investment in Israel.¹²⁴ The investment will fund the Red Sea Land Bridge, a cargo rail line that will extend from Eilat in the Red Sea to Haifa in the Mediterranean, providing a land bridge through Israel that will bypass the Suez Canal and enable the faster transit of goods.¹²⁵ Although this project is one of many infrastructure investments that China is undertaking in the region, Beijing's investment indicates the perception of Israel as a source of stability, which could help ensure that China's trade with Europe is unaffected by any turmoil threatening the Suez Canal. The railway also provides an incentive for continuing cooperation between the two powers.

F. THE ARAB SPRING: CHINA'S REACTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SINO-ISRAELI RELATIONS

China's response to recent events in the Middle East indicated a move away from a policy of non-interference and demonstrated a fledgling policy of hedging bets to best secure its interests amidst growing instability. Some scholars have argued that China dismissed the Arab Spring as an internal affair, responded with its characteristic policy of non-interference, and primarily reacted with a domestic response of "social management" to prevent similar uprisings inside of China.¹²⁶ Other evidence suggests that the dramatic changes that have come in the wake of the Arab Spring have forced Beijing to reassess its

¹²² Witte, "Quiet Transformations."

¹²³ Yoram Evron, "Chinese Investments in Israel: Opportunity or National Threat?" *INSS Insight*, no. 538 (April 8, 2014): 1.

¹²⁴ *Hearing before the Commission*, 69 (statement of Edwards).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62, 63, 68–69.

¹²⁶ *Hearing before the Commission*, 36 (statement of Shichor).

regional policy, and take direct, albeit subtle, steps to respond to these conflicts. These changes are likely to alter China's perception of Israel's utility and offer the potential for a reinvigoration of defense relations, which have been close to non-existent following the Harpy controversy.¹²⁷

Libya and Syria provide contrasting cases of China's reactions to the Arab Spring, which nevertheless demonstrate a common shift in policy as China feels out the best way to respond to the changing regional dynamics. Despite significant investments in Libya and a commitment to the norm of non-interference, China helped pass a UN resolution that placed an arms embargo on the Qaddafi regime and did not block the Security Council resolution that authorized the imposition of a no-fly zone in Libya and other measures to protect civilians.¹²⁸ However, China did criticize the NATO operation for exceeding its mandate.¹²⁹

During the summer of 2011, Chinese officials met with Libyan opposition leaders.¹³⁰ Around the same time, a Chinese arms corporation met with Qaddafi to set up an arms deal after the UN embargo outlawed such support; although, Beijing did deny official knowledge of this meeting.¹³¹ When opposition forces initially set up an alternative government, China refused to recognize it, but when Qaddafi was killed in October 2011, China moved to establish official relations with the new government.¹³² This meandering course demonstrates a hedging of bets and attempt to balance competing interests: securing investments, avoiding antagonizing the Arab states that supported the UN resolutions against Qaddafi, and trying to maintain some consistency with its traditional policy of non-interference. In retrospect, Beijing perceived its response to Libya as a failure, especially when China was condemned by a major Libyan Oil

¹²⁷ Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations," 252.

¹²⁸ Yoram Evron, "Chinese Involvement in the Middle East: The Libyan and Syrian Crises," *Strategic Assessment* 16, no. 3 (October 2013): 81.

¹²⁹ *Hearing before the Commission*, 35 (statement of Shichor).

¹³⁰ Evron, "Libyan and Syrian Cases," 82.

¹³¹ *Hearing before the Commission*, 103 (statement of John B. Alterman); Evron, "Libyan and Syrian Cases," 83.

¹³² Evron, "Libyan and Syrian Cases," 82–83.

Company for its support of the regime.¹³³ The loss of investments, loss of international credibility, and acquiescence in Western intervention influenced China's response to Syria, which involved much more overt and continuing support of the regime.¹³⁴

Syria offers a more poignant example of China's evolving policy. China's economic interests in Syria, although not insignificant, were much less than in Libya, but Beijing was willing to take greater measures to support Assad's regime, primarily through its veto on the UN Security Council. China's four vetoes regarding Syria, one as recently as May 2014, demonstrate a shift in policy, as China has usually articulated disapproval through abstention.¹³⁵

The primary impetus behind these vetoes was aligning with Russia to counter-balance Western influence over regional affairs, but Beijing also sought the best course of action for ensuring regional stability and adhering to a policy of non-interference.¹³⁶ China's use of the veto in support of Assad's regime notwithstanding, Chinese officials have met with opposition leaders numerous times in support of implementing regime change to restore stability. Uncharacteristically, China also issued two independent initiatives for resolving the conflict.¹³⁷ As with Libya, but this time more pronounced, China demonstrated a hedging of bets by offering support to both sides.

The Arab Spring brought many of China's regional policies to a head: the need to secure economic interests, a desire for regional stability, and the aspiration to counter-balance U.S. hegemony. Within this shifting regional context, a policy of non-interference was not a valid option. Choosing not to interfere was tacit support of one side, and Beijing was faced with criticism no matter how it responded. The economically-pragmatic, politically-passive approach of past years was no longer an appropriate

¹³³ Lin, "China's Strategic Shift," 44.

¹³⁴ Lin, "China's Strategic Shift," 44–45; *Hearing before the Commission*, 103 (statement of Shichor).

¹³⁵ *Hearing before the Commission*, 9 (statement of Murphy); "Security Council- Veto List."

¹³⁶ Lin, "China's Strategic Shift" 45; Evron, "Libyan and Syrian Crises," 85.

¹³⁷ Evron, "Libyan and Syrian Cases," 86–87.

response during a time of increased hostilities and growing instability in a region where China was already significantly invested and economically dependent.

China's response to the Arab Spring demonstrates a changing regional context more than a deliberate shift in policy, but these events suggest how difficult it will be for China to adhere to its policy of non-interference as the region descends into further instability. The complexity of the Middle East will force China to make some hard decisions about the best way to protect its interests as Beijing struggles to develop a coherent regional policy. Whereas China's interests were furthered in the past through a passive approach to contentious regional issues, the changing regional context is forcing China to make choices about which actions or inactions best safeguard its interests.

The way China responded challenged some of the common assumptions regarding its regional policies. China has been much more involved in the Syrian Crisis, despite far less economic interests in the country. Beijing demonstrated a more assertive approach and willingness to get involved that departs from its previous policy of non-interference, and its actions were as driven by its relationship with other international powers as they were by its regional interests.¹³⁸

Beyond shaping the outcome through political maneuvers, China took other independent measures to protect its interests. Meeting with opposition leaders and issuing independent initiatives on resolving the Syrian crisis go a step beyond votes on the Security Council in actively shaping the outcome. Through military airlift and ships, China evacuated thousands of its citizens working in Libya, representing the first time China has been forced to take such extensive measures and demonstrating the logistical capability to be able to do so. Beijing also took preparatory steps for the evacuation of its citizens in Syria.¹³⁹ These actions, along with China's recent antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, demonstrate that to some degree regional events are likely to compel direct

¹³⁸ Ibid., 88.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 82, 87.

Chinese involvement.¹⁴⁰ This type of involvement could have influence the military capabilities and partnerships Beijing pursues in the future.

Within this shifting regional context, defense relations with Israel have the potential to take on a renewed significance. Yoram Evron argues that the Israeli defense establishment offers the potential for new roles in a number of ways: a source of intelligence on changes in the region, a key to stability regarding some of the region's hottest topics, and better insight into Israel's perception of its security concerns and actions it will take to ensure its security.¹⁴¹ Enhanced defense relations also offer the potential for China to increase its involvement with regional developments without undermining U.S. policy. Conversely, if the dynamics unleashed by the Arab Spring eventually result in the Arab masses having a greater voice, then Arab states will likely put greater pressure on Beijing to avoid enhanced relations with Israel.

G. ISRAEL AS A KEY TO REGIONAL STABILITY

Two of the most explosive issues affecting regional stability are influenced by Israel's actions: the Iranian nuclear program and Arab-Israeli hostilities. Iran is China's third largest supplier of oil, and in many ways, China has benefitted from the West's policy of isolating Iran through the sanctions regime by taking advantage of reduced demand and the lack of competition for investments. Also, as an adversary to the United States, Iran represents an oil supplier that would be immune to U.S. diplomatic pressure in the event of U.S.-Chinese hostilities.¹⁴² At the same time, Beijing shares concerns about how Iran's nuclear weapons capability could affect regional stability and desires to be viewed as a responsible world power.¹⁴³ Recently, maintaining this balance has resulted in tepid support of the sanctions regime, while simultaneously taking efforts towards decreasing its reliance on Iranian oil.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ *Hearing before the Commission*, 21–22 (statement of Murphy).

¹⁴¹ Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations," 251.

¹⁴² *Hearing before the Commission*, 99 (statement of Alterman).

¹⁴³ Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations," 249.

¹⁴⁴ *Hearing before the Commission*, 30 (statement of Shichor).

Any Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear program would significantly affect China's oil supply, but Chinese experts remain divided over how realistic the possibility of an Israeli attack is.¹⁴⁵ In the past, Beijing's support of Tehran have been a source of tension in Sino-Israeli relations, as Israeli officials went to lengths to convince Beijing of the military purpose of Iran's nuclear program, the detrimental impact to regional stability if Tehran developed a nuclear weapon, and Israel's resolve to stop Tehran from acquiring this capability.¹⁴⁶ Israeli attempts to press China to take a firmer stance against Iran's nuclear program have not yielded much success in the past so recently the two states have put these, and other, disagreements aside to focus on increasing trade relations.¹⁴⁷

The Arab-Israeli conflict is perceived by China as the key to regional stability.¹⁴⁸ Despite Israel's economic importance, China has been a traditional ally of Palestine. China was the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and during the Cold War, the PLO was one of the few liberation organizations to which China offered financial support.¹⁴⁹ Ideologically, the Chinese tend to empathize with the Palestinians as fellow victims of imperialism. One study, based upon a review of Chinese scholarly works, found an increasing pro-Palestinian stance in Chinese scholarly literature. Still, economic considerations continue to dictate Chinese policy over norms of justice.¹⁵⁰

Although China may not see any economic imperative for cooperation with Palestine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict permeates throughout other regional issues. A number of variables could affect which side it is in China's best interest to support: the U.S. future role in the region and future support of Israel, the leverage of oil producers, and Israel's willingness as a partner in the transfer of technologies.

¹⁴⁵ Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations," 249; *Hearing before the Commission*, 60 (statement of Erica Downs); *Hearing before the Commission*, 116–117 (statement of Joel Wuthnow).

¹⁴⁶ Evron, "Sino-Israeli Defense Relations," 249.

¹⁴⁷ *Hearing before the Commission*, 33 (statement of Shichor).

¹⁴⁸ *Hearing before the Commission*, 17 (statement of Murphy).

¹⁴⁹ Alterman and Garver, *Vital Triangle*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Yiyi Chen, "The Basis of China's Pro-Palestinian Stance and the Current Status of its Implementation," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 216–220, 223.

It remains to be seen exactly what Chinese involvement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would look like, but there are indications that China's leaders are becoming more engaged with the issue. In May 2013, China hosted both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, albeit in different locations.¹⁵¹ During the same month, Chinese President Xi Jinping set forth his four points for the peace process. His framework for peace is based on a two-state solution, which advocates mutual concessions, a settlement building freeze, and "land for peace." The policy's fourth point offers a jab at the U.S. past efforts and suggests China's willingness to play the role of mediator: "Relevant parties of the international community should have a greater sense of responsibility and urgency, take an objective and fair position, make vigorous efforts to encourage peace talks, and increase assistance to Palestine in such fields as human resources training and economic development."¹⁵²

More than support for any one side, China's interests in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict involves ensuring regional stability and gaining international credibility by constructively influencing the peace process. Playing the role of mediator is a clear way for China to increase their regional influence through soft power and demonstrate itself as a responsible world power as a part of "Marching Westwards."¹⁵³ Being able to play a constructive role necessitates maintaining positive relations with both sides and being perceived as a non-biased party.

Neither the Iranian nuclear issue nor the Israeli-Palestinian conflict indicates that China would be willing to sacrifice relations with Arab nations in order to have greater influence over Israel. However, Israel's role in both issues provides a reason to avoid antagonizing Tel Aviv in order to maintain some degree of influence over its behavior.

¹⁵¹ "China/Israel/Palestine Territories Politics: Playing the Peacemaker?" *Economist Intelligence Unit*, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/1350257633?accountid=12702>

¹⁵² "Chinese President Makes Four-Point Proposal."

¹⁵³ Jisi, "Marching Westwards," 8.

H. CONCLUSION: “FEELING FOR STONES”

In retrospect, Deng Xiaoping described the economic reforms that propelled China to superpower status as “crossing the river by feeling for stones.”¹⁵⁴ China’s Middle Eastern policy must be seen in a similar light. While many speculate on what China’s involvement in the Middle East will look like based on its growing economic interests, none of these investments are determinative of any particular type of involvement. Nevertheless, Sino-Israeli relations will be a major factor in China’s Middle Eastern policy as it continues to evolve.

Thus far, China has sought to increase economic cooperation with all parties, regardless of the hostilities that may isolate these actors from each other. China’s relationship with Israel has been no different. Trade continues to grow between the two states, despite growing ties with other Middle Eastern states. Presenting the future of Sino-Israeli relations as a choice between Israeli technology and Arabian oil is a false dichotomy, which Chinese leaders have taken steps to avoid. Still, Chinese regional involvement will necessitate making some tough choices about how best to protect its interests amidst a continually dynamic security environment. Acquiescence to a U.S.-enforced order would enable Sino-Israeli relations to continue to grow, possibly beyond strictly economic grounds, but both parties have significant interests tempering the nature of their relationship. Israel must balance the desire for growing cooperation with the U.S. perception of China as a competitor. China must balance Sino-Israeli ties with the risk of antagonizing other Middle Eastern nations.

Both Israeli and Chinese leaders have been in search of common ground to build the foundation for future cooperation. For Israel, China’s growing economic interests in the region and global power makes it in its long-term interest to have closer ties with this rising superpower, especially in a hostile environment where it faces continual isolation. For China, Israel is a source of key technology and a stable country in a volatile region with a formidable defense force. Closer relations with Israel could help give shape to its

¹⁵⁴ Christopher P. Twomey and Xu Hui, “Military Developments,” in *Debating China: The U.S.-China Relationship in Ten Conversations*, ed. Nina Hachigian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 158.

fledgling policy. At the moment, closer relations pose certain risks for both sides. A changing international and regional context either could pull these powers together or apart. In the meantime, both sides appear to be hedging their bets by laying the foundation for future cooperation.

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IV. INDO-ISRAELI RELATIONS: PARTNERS WITH CONSTRAINTS

India's Middle East policy during the Cold War was founded on its refusal of normal diplomatic relations with Israel, a stance in keeping with its position as one of the leading states of the non-aligned world. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Indo-Israeli ties have come to play an important, albeit closely guarded, role in helping India realize its great power ambitions. Security cooperation and trade have brought these powers closer together, but much of this cooperation has taken place behind closed doors. New Delhi has been reluctant to publicize relations through high-level political contacts due to the potential blowback from domestic opinion. Similarly, energy security and workers' remittances continue to shape India's interests in the region and necessitate close ties with Arab states. These regional interests have influenced New Delhi's responses to the Arab-Israeli conflict in international forums but have not affected the strength of bilateral ties. With the spring 2014 election bringing the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) into power and the threat of Islamic terrorism on the subcontinent growing, Indo-Israeli ties are likely to strengthen. India's broader interests are likely to prevent this partnership from evolving into an outright alliance, but the security cooperation that serves as the foundation of the relationship can be expected to deepen nonetheless.

A. A DELAYED WARMTH REALIZED IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD

On January 29, 1992, India established official diplomatic relations with Israel. The timing of this decision—coming over four decades after India recognized the de facto existence of the Jewish state—was telling of the factors that enabled normalization: the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a changing Middle Eastern context, and a domestic economic crisis. This new step in bilateral ties was the product of a changing world, and Indo-Israeli relations were a harbinger of India's reorientation in this new world order.

Throughout the Cold War, a number of factors influenced India's relations with Middle Eastern powers. New Delhi's leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

inhibited relations with Israel, as inclusion of the Jewish state would have stopped Arab powers from joining. The dominance of the Pakistani factor in foreign policy drove India to adopt a pro-Arab policy in the hope of gaining reciprocal support vis-à-vis the disputed Kashmir territory.¹⁵⁵ Also, the need to ensure energy security became an important reason to maintain a pro-Arab stance. The centerpiece of India's pro-Arab policy was non-relations with Israel and support of the Palestinians.

Although India maintained a non-aligned stance throughout the Cold War, it came to lean heavily on the Soviet Union. The disintegration of the Soviet Union ended the bloc politics that had defined the Cold War, opening up space in India's foreign policy.¹⁵⁶ New Delhi also had to adjust to the new security environment in Asia without the help of its traditional arms supplier. With the Soviet Union's economy in disarray, finding a new source of military technology was critical in an environment where Pakistan possessed Western technology and China was undertaking a program of military modernization.¹⁵⁷

The Gulf War and the Madrid Peace Process both called into question India's traditional policy of non-relations with Israel. As the Gulf counties turned against the PLO, owing to the group's support of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, India's pro-Palestinian stance no longer provided a means for furthering its interests in the region.¹⁵⁸ Subsequently, Arab states began establishing relations with Israel as a part of the Madrid Peace Process. This new regional context enabled India to change its policy towards Israel without any significant loss of credibility amongst Arab nations. Indeed it almost compelled New Delhi to do so, if it wished to play a role in the peace process.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, India's long-time pro-Arab policy had never gained the desired reciprocal

¹⁵⁵ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁵⁷ Gil Feiler, "India's Economic Relations with Israel and the Arabs," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* no. 96 (July 2012): 17.

¹⁵⁸ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

support in the case of Indian-Pakistani hostilities, and Arab powers no longer wielded the leverage over oil supplies that they once possessed.¹⁶⁰

Economic factors also influenced India's decision for normalization. The Gulf Crisis of 1990-91 was detrimental to India's economy. A spike in oil prices coupled with a significant reduction in remittances from Indians working in the Gulf drove the economy into a crisis.¹⁶¹ New Delhi was facing an economic crisis of such severity that it had to mortgage two hundred tons of the national gold reserves to fund two weeks' worth of imports.¹⁶² India needed support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to help with the recovery. Establishing relations with Israel served as a signal of India's new orientation in foreign policy in the hopes of gaining Western support for its economic recovery. Tellingly, the announcement of formal Indo-Israeli relations was made within hours of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's visit with President George H.W. Bush, as part of a United Nations Security Council summit meeting.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Indian officials were compelled to undertake reforms of economic liberalization, which would integrate India into the globalized economy of which Israel was a part.¹⁶⁴

India's Israel policy was a part of a broader change in the international context that saw a number of new powers establishing relations with Israel. Notably, India's decisions came within days of China establishing official relations with Israel.¹⁶⁵ In short, India's new policy towards Israel was a landmark event that reversed almost a half century's worth of non-relations and signified India's willingness to evolve with a changing world. Indo-Israeli relations have only grown in importance as New Delhi has sought to play the role of a great power in the post-Cold War world order.

¹⁶⁰ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 6; Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 91.

¹⁶¹ Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 2.

¹⁶² P.R. Kumaraswamy, "The Friendship with Israel: India Squares the Circle," *Middle East Institute Insights* no. 004 (2009): 4.

¹⁶³ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 271.

¹⁶⁴ Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 91.

¹⁶⁵ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 23, 240.

B. INDIA'S INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The energy trade and expatriate remittances are India's primary interests in the Middle East. As the world's fourth largest consumer of oil and with imports making up 70 percent of this consumption, India is heavily dependent on the region for energy security. In 2013, the Middle East supplied 62 percent of India's oil imports, with Saudi Arabia accounting for 20 percent of the total and Iraq, as India's second largest supplier, accounting for 14 percent. With an average annual growth of 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) since 2000, India's energy demand will only continue to grow, while domestic crude oil production is expected to remain stagnant.¹⁶⁶

Moreover, refined petroleum is one of India's largest exports. India has a large and growing capacity for oil refining, and its geographic location is well suited for this enterprise, due to its proximity to Middle Eastern crude oil and its proximity to Middle Eastern and Asian markets for refined petroleum.¹⁶⁷ Because of the importance of the energy trade for India's economy, as a whole, the Persian Gulf is India's largest trading partner.¹⁶⁸ With oil making up a significant amount of both imports and exports—in recent years oil and petroleum have made up a quarter of India's foreign trade—New Delhi is particularly reliant upon regional stability to ensure the free flow of oil.¹⁶⁹

Indian expatriate labor also significantly shapes New Delhi's relations with the region. Estimates vary, but somewhere between five and seven million Indian citizens work in the Middle East, primarily in the Gulf, and remittances make up 3 - 4 percent of India's GDP.¹⁷⁰ In many Gulf States, Indian laborers make up a significant percentage of the local population. Indian citizens account for 44 percent of the local population in

¹⁶⁶ "EIA Country Report: India."

¹⁶⁷ International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2007: China and India Energy Insights* (Paris: International Energy Agency, 2007), 494, http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/media/weowebbsite/2008-1994/weo_2007.pdf

¹⁶⁸ Josi, "India's Isolationism."

¹⁶⁹ P.R. Kumaraswamy, *Reading the Silence: India and the Arab Spring* (Jerusalem: Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012), 17.

¹⁷⁰ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 239; Kumaraswamy, *Reading the Silence*, 18; Josi, "India's Isolationism;" "Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP)," World Bank, accessed October 16, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>

Bahrain and 37 percent in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while close to 1.8 million Indians work in Saudi Arabia.¹⁷¹

Expatriate workers are both a source of tension and common interest between India and the Gulf powers. Controversies regarding the ill treatment of these workers create friction between New Delhi and the host nations. At the same time, India is dependent on stability in these countries for the safety and livelihood of its citizens working there. New Delhi is also reliant on these jobs for a number of socio-economic reasons: their contribution to GDP and the balance of trade, the support revenues provide families back home, and the lack of capacity to absorb this labor domestically.¹⁷²

The large number of Indian citizens working in the region constrains New Delhi's freedom of maneuver in responding to regional developments. During times of crises India is forced to cooperate with often unsavory regimes to ensure the safety of its citizens. More than any other consideration, the fate of Indian citizens working in the region shaped India's response to the Arab Spring.¹⁷³

In short, India has significant economic interests in the Middle East that make it particularly reliant on regional stability and the uninterrupted flow of oil. India's dependence on Middle Eastern oil will only increase as India continues to grow economically and must meet the needs of a burgeoning middle class. A dependence on the region for energy security, coupled with a large number of Indian citizens working in the region, shapes India's response to regional events and relations with Middle Eastern powers. These interests notwithstanding, Indo-Israeli relations have grown stronger despite India's economic dependence on Arab powers.

C. INDO-ISRAELI SECURITY COOPERATION

Even before the establishment of official relations, Israel offered limited defense assistance to India. It provided arms to India during its 1962 war with China, and again

¹⁷¹ Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 27.

¹⁷² Ibid., 27–28; Kumaraswamy, *Reading the Silence*, 19.

¹⁷³ Kumaraswamy, *Reading the Silence*, 27, 30.

during the Indo-Pakistani War in 1965.¹⁷⁴ Since normalization, security cooperation has transformed Indo-Israeli relations into a strategic partnership. India and Israel share similar security environments and have defense needs that are complementary. Both states face prolonged low intensity conflicts with neighboring powers. The threats of cross-border incursions and Islamic terrorism backed by these neighbors are a constant concern. More poignantly, India and Israel share a common concern about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) among regional states whose stability and political aims they regard as suspect.¹⁷⁵ With India in need of technological expertise and Israel in need of an arms market to maintain a qualitative edge in its defense sector, Indo-Israeli ties have provided a mutually beneficial means to addressing these security threats.

The robust defense ties that have developed over the past two decades reflect the security environment that gives them shape. Each round of hostilities that India has engaged in over the past two decades, particularly the 1999 Kargil War with Pakistan and the 2008 Mumbai attacks by the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, have increased the importance of security cooperation with Israel. During the Kargil War, Israel proved itself as a reliable arms supplier as it sped up the supply of necessary military equipment, including providing India with the precision munitions needed to target Pakistani bunkers.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the conflict demonstrated to Indian officials the need for Israeli assistance in border security and counter-terrorism measures, leading to an institutionalization of defense cooperation.¹⁷⁷ The Mumbai attacks, which included the targeting of a Jewish site and resulted in Israeli casualties, brought an increase in defense expenditures and catalyzed further cooperation between the two powers.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Harsh V. Pant, "India-Israel Partnership: Convergence and Constraints," GLORIA Center, December 6, 2004, <http://www.gloria-center.org/2004/12/pant-2004-12-06/>

¹⁷⁵ Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 92–93.

¹⁷⁶ Yiftah S. Shapir, "Israel's Arms Sales to India," *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 3 (November 2009): 29; Pant, "Convergence and Constraints."

¹⁷⁷ Nicolas Blarel, "Indo-Israeli Relations: Emergence of a Strategic Partnership," in *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Sumit Ganguly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163.

¹⁷⁸ Shapir, "Israel's Arms Sales," 30; Inbar and Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation, 13.

Intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism measures, and border security are prominent areas of cooperation. India and Israel founded a Joint Working Group on Defense Cooperation in 2001 and a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism in 2002, and the two states signed an intelligence-sharing agreement in 2007.¹⁷⁹ Israel has also been one of the few powers to provide direct support to India in its fight against the insurgency in Kashmir, offering specialized surveillance equipment, providing cooperation on intelligence gathering and disrupting funding, and training and advising Indian forces.¹⁸⁰

Arms sales are the most quantifiable component of Indo-Israeli security cooperation. The value of their defense trade over the past decade is estimated at \$10 billion.¹⁸¹ Israel is India's second largest arms supplier, and during some recent years has even overtaken Russia as the largest supplier.¹⁸² This figure is remarkable considering that Israel primarily sells systems and subsystems as opposed to whole platforms. Conversely, India is Israel's largest arms market, and India's importance as an export market has only grown over the past decade after Sino-Israeli arms sales subsided in the face of U.S. pressure.

Israel serves as an ideal arms supplier due to its technological expertise, ability to upgrade India's Soviet-era platforms, and its qualitative edge in areas pertinent to India's defense: border security, missile defense, and electronic surveillance.¹⁸³ A few of the most notable trade deals include a \$1.1 billion agreement for the Phalcon AWACS, hundreds of millions of dollars in sales of various UAVs, the upgrading of India's MiG fighters, and billion dollar deals for Spyder surface-to-air missiles and anti-missile air

¹⁷⁹ Mushtaq Hussain, "India-Israel Relations: Towards 'Strategic Cooperation,'" *Middle East Institute Occasional Paper* no. 29 (January 2012); Blarel, "Emergence of a Strategic Partnership," 163.

¹⁸⁰ Pant, "Convergence and Constraints;" Ilan Berman, "Israel, India, and Turkey: Triple Entente?" *Middle East Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 36.

¹⁸¹ Sujata Ashwarya Cheema, "India's Iran-Israel Balancing Act," *E-International Relations*, March 7, 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/03/07/indias-iran-israel-balancing-act/>

¹⁸² P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Israel in the World: The Maturation of Indo-Israeli Ties," *Middle East Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 47; Geoffrey Kemp, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2010), 135.

¹⁸³ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 257.

defense.¹⁸⁴ The Phalcon deal was especially relevant from a geopolitical perspective. Washington blocked a similar deal between Israel and China a few years before. New Delhi took this into account and brought Washington into the deal to ensure it went through. Washington's acquiescence points to wider implications of an Indo-Israeli partnership, one that the United States evidently regards as favorable to the balance of power in Asia.¹⁸⁵

There is a maritime dimension to Indo-Israeli ties, one that offers a potential advantage to Israel beyond the arms market that India currently provides. For India, the maritime component of cooperation has extended to the procurement of Barak ship defense missiles, UAVs for maritime patrol, and radar and surveillance systems for coastal defense.¹⁸⁶ For Israel, it comes in the potential to use Indian ports for logistical support of its submarine force. This would offer Israel a level of strategic depth for countering future attacks. With both states facing a nuclear threat, the maritime theater is essential for a credible second-strike capability.¹⁸⁷ Indo-Israeli cooperation helped Israel acquire a maritime second-strike capability, including reports of Israel coordinating with India to test submarine-launched missiles off of India's shore. So far, there have been no reports of the Israeli navy using Indian ports.¹⁸⁸

Indo-Israeli defense ties have even extended into space, taking advantage of each nation's strengths. Israel has high-quality imaging satellites, and India has an advanced space program with the technology and geography to launch satellites.¹⁸⁹ In 2008, India launched the Israeli TechSAR reconnaissance satellite on the behalf of Israel. India

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.; S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "The Delicate Balance: Israel and India's Foreign Policy Practice," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 1 (January 2012): 130; Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 95.

¹⁸⁵ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 259; Harsh V. Pant, "India and Middle East: A Re-Assessment of Priorities?" in *Indian Foreign Policy in a Unipolar World*, ed. Harsh V. Pant (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 275.

¹⁸⁶ Yuval Zur, Tamir Magal, and Nadav Kedem, "The Growing Power of the Indian Navy: Westward Bound," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 4, no. 3 (December 2012): 113.

¹⁸⁷ Zahid Ali Khan, "Development in Indo-Israel Defense Relations Since 9/11: Pakistan's Security Concern and Policy Options," *South Asia Studies* 26, no. 1 (January–June 2011): 142, 145.

¹⁸⁸ Inbar and Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation," 11; Sushil J. Aaron, *Straddling Faultlines: India's Foreign Policy towards the Greater Middle East* (New Delhi: French Research Institutes in India, 2003), 20.

¹⁸⁹ Khan, "Development in Indo-Israel Defense," 137.

attempted to present this deal as a purely commercial transaction, but Israeli publications claimed that the satellite would be used to monitor Iran.¹⁹⁰ Later, the Mumbai attacks made apparent to New Delhi the need for enhanced border security. To increase its surveillance capability, India launched two Israeli imaging satellites in 2009, which were similar to the TechSAR launched the previous year.¹⁹¹

One aspect of defense cooperation that speaks to the strength of the partnership is the number of joint ventures they have undertaken together. In one regard, joint ventures are a product of India's and Israel's complementary strengths, taking advantage of Israeli technological expertise and India's manufacturing sector.¹⁹² Apart from its economic sense, joint ventures demonstrate a degree of intimacy between the two powers. With the sharing of sensitive technology, the need for both sides to meet their expected research and development (R&D) contributions, and the partners dependent on each side fulfilling their promised acquisition numbers, joint ventures in military technology require a high level of trust and expectation of long-term cooperation. Some of these programs include the next generation Barak missile ship defense missile system, the Swordfish Long Range Tracking Radar (LRTR), and the Indian Navy Extra Fast Attack Craft (XFAC).¹⁹³

Regional concerns over Indo-Israeli defense ties indicate the strategic dimensions of the relationship. Islamabad fears that the strategic balance on the subcontinent is changing in India's favor as India acquires conventional weapons that have an edge on Pakistani arms and develops the surveillance and anti-missile capability to counter Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.¹⁹⁴ Following India's nuclear tests in 1998, Arab leaders professed growing concern about nuclear cooperation between the two powers, which both sides deny.¹⁹⁵ Tehran has remained largely silent about Indo-Israeli ties but did express its concern to New Delhi over the 2008 launch of the spy satellite on Israel's

¹⁹⁰ Cheema, "India's Iran-Israel Balancing Act."

¹⁹¹ Shapir, "Israel's Arms Sales," 31; Khan, "Development in Indo-Israel Defense," 137.

¹⁹² Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 91, 96.

¹⁹³ "Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 17-18; Hussain, "Towards 'Strategic Cooperation.'"

¹⁹⁴ Pant, "Convergence and Constraints;" Khan, "Development in Indo-Israel Defense," 140.

¹⁹⁵ Aaron, *Straddling Faultlines*, 23.

behalf.¹⁹⁶ Due to these concerns, both sides are careful not to present their cooperation as directed at a particular enemy, and India has striven for balance through cooperation with other powers.

A few factors could weaken Indo-Israeli defense ties in the future. Since many arms sales involve the transfer of Israeli technology, there is the potential for India's domestic production to improve enough to be able to meet its defense needs. Also, as Washington eases restriction on the export of military technology to India, there is a strong potential for the United States to become a prominent arms supplier to India, putting Israeli firms into competition with American firms. Allegations of corruption and bribery have also haunted Indo-Israeli defense trade in recent years.¹⁹⁷

Although these developments could affect defense trade, in the past five years India has been the largest importer of arms world-wide, and is projected to become the fourth biggest spender on defense by 2020. As India faces a continually hostile Pakistan, the growing threat of Islamic terrorism, and a resurgent China, it must ensure its military is effective in a range of theaters.¹⁹⁸ This translates to a large and growing market for Israel, which offers some niche capabilities that are particularly suited for addressing India's continual threats of border incursions and terrorism.¹⁹⁹ Also, security cooperation extends beyond the sale of technology. As long as both states continue to face similar threats, their partnership will remain an important means to address these problems.

D. INDO-ISRAELI ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Apart from defense trade, economic relations between the two powers have grown exponentially since normalization. Trade between the two was a mere \$200 million when relations were established, but since it has grown to \$6 billion a year.²⁰⁰ A free trade

¹⁹⁶ Yiftah S. Shapir, "Walking a Fine Line: Israel, India, and Iran," *Strategic Assessment* 16, no. 1 (April 2013): 82–83.

¹⁹⁷ Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 19.

¹⁹⁸ "India as a Great Power: Know Your Strength," *The Economist*, March 30, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21574458-india-poised-become-one-four-largest-military-powers-world-end>

¹⁹⁹ Inbar and Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli Defense Cooperation," 19.

²⁰⁰ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 254; "Export Import Data Bank."

agreement that has been in the works for the past three years and expected to be completed next year will enable this number to grow to a projected \$12 billion.²⁰¹ Numbers do not tell the full story, however, in the value of these economic relations.

On one hand, the majority of trade is in a single commodity, diamonds. A group of Indian business families in Israel export uncut diamonds to India for refinement and then import the refined product for further sale. Thus, the bulk of trade, measured in terms of value-added, is insignificant.²⁰²

On the other hand, some areas of trade are more important for India's development than can be quantified. Trade in agricultural technology, water management technology, energy conservation, and renewable energy are critical to meeting India's development challenges. With the agricultural sector—the largest source of Indian employment—outpaced by the rest of the economy, food security an ever looming problem, and rural development one of India's primary goals, Israeli technology has the potential to play a vital role in helping India make the most efficient use of its natural resources.²⁰³

Moreover, the strength of economic relations cannot be measured purely in terms of trade. Joint cooperation extends into the civilian sector, especially in the field of science and technology. An Israeli semiconductor firm is currently involved in a \$10 billion deal for the construction of two semiconductor fabrication plants in India.²⁰⁴ Security cooperation and bilateral trade point to the strong and growing potential of Indo-Israeli ties, but New Delhi has domestic and foreign interests that place constraints on relations.

²⁰¹ "India-Israel FTA Talks Likely to Be Completed Next Year," *The Hindu*, May 14, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/indiaisrael-fta-talks-likely-to-be-completed-next-year/article6005957.ece>; Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 9.

²⁰² Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 255–256.

²⁰³ Feiler, "India's Economic Relations," 9, 13.

²⁰⁴ Palash Ghosh, "India 2014 Elections: Narendra Modi, Israel's Best Friend in South Asia," *International Business Times*, March 17, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/india-2014-elections-narendra-modi-israels-best-friend-south-asia-1561837>

E. THE DOMESTIC FACTOR: THE CONVERSATION SHIFTS FROM EXISTENCE TO EXTENT

India has the third largest Muslim population in the world: approximately 150 million people, about one eighth of the nation's total. Only Indonesia and Pakistan have greater numbers.²⁰⁵ Although discussing Muslim domestic opinion as a constraint on Indo-Israeli relations remains a taboo subject, due to India's insistence on the secular nature of the state, it has undoubtedly played a role in the relationship between the two states. The Pakistani factor gave Indian leaders a means to portray an anti-Israeli policy as a result of foreign, rather than domestic, considerations throughout the Cold War, but since the establishment of relations, domestic politics has come to the forefront as a factor in Indo-Israeli relations.²⁰⁶

The effect of domestic opinion on bilateral relations has changed over the two decades of official relations. In the beginning, the conversation was over whether or not to establish relations. As Indo-Israeli relations have come to be accepted as in the national interest, the conversation has shifted, and domestic politics has come to have more of an effect on the visibility of relations, and also to impact India's stance in international forums.

The ascendance of the BJP, a right-wing, Hindu nationalist party, was part of the domestic landscape that made official relations possible. The BJP's pro-Israeli stance has led to the controversial conception of an anti-Muslim alliance between India's right-wing party and Israel; however, the persistence of strong bilateral ties regardless of the party in power demonstrates that Indo-Israeli relations, while not unaffected by domestic considerations, are primarily a result of converging national interests.²⁰⁷

It was under the leftist Congress party, which enjoys Muslim support, that relations were initially established and continued to grow throughout the 1990s, even though support for the Palestinians persisted as before. Throughout the 1990s, New Delhi continued to voice support for the Palestinian cause in international forums and avoided

²⁰⁵ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 142.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 140, 157.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 252, 254.

high-level political contacts with Israeli leadership, while simultaneously pursuing security cooperation and trade with Israel. During the BJP's tenure in power, 1998-2004, bilateral relations were strengthened and became more public. Despite the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, Indo-Israeli relations continued unfettered. Ariel Sharon visited India in 2003, the first time an Israeli prime minister was invited to do so. The protests from Muslims and Communist parties that this visit sparked were demonstrative of the domestic constraints that affect the relationship, but also of their limited effect.²⁰⁸

When the Congress Party regained control in 2004, Indo-Israeli relations continued to strengthen, but high-level political contacts subsided. With the BJP regaining power in the spring 2014 election, the visibility of relations has changed once again. At the September 2014 United Nations summit meeting, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the first meeting between prime ministers since Sharon's visit in 2003. The BJP's overwhelming victory in the recent election is likely to mark a new period in Indo-Israeli relations. The appointment of Sushma Swaraj, former chair of the Indo-Israeli Parliamentary Friendship Group, as foreign minister is one of many positive signs of what the BJP's overwhelming hold on power may mean for Indo-Israeli relations.²⁰⁹ Still, that Indo-Israeli relations have persisted over two decades throughout different leadership speaks to a deeper national interest in fostering ties. Domestic politics are undoubtedly a factor in the ebb and flow of trade and security cooperation on the margins, but they have come to affect the visibility and extent of such relations, not their existence.

Domestic considerations also affect Indo-Israeli ties at the state level. The reforms of economic liberalization undertaken in the 1990s gave state leaders the autonomy to foster ties conducive to economic growth. Many state leaders, uninhibited by domestic opinion or international scrutiny, sought cooperation with Israel to promote growth.²¹⁰ Modi visited Israel in 2006 while he was the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 250, 261.

²⁰⁹ Herb Keinon, "Indo-Israeli Ties on the March," *Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Indo-Israel-ties-on-the-march-376555>

²¹⁰ Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, 251.

and expanded trade ties with Israel in water management and solar energy.²¹¹ With state populations that exceed the size of major countries—Gujarat’s population of 60 million is similar to Italy’s—direct relations between Israel and Indian states can significantly expand economic ties.²¹²

F. INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY: A SEARCH FOR BALANCE

Despite the robustness of Indo-Israeli relations, New Delhi has gone to great lengths to ensure a balance in foreign policy, and this has extended to the Middle East as much as any other region: “India’s Middle East policy is thus a delicate dance between combating terror and shoring up military might on the one hand, and securing energy supplies and extending economic links on the other.”²¹³ Achieving balance in the case of Indo-Israeli ties has translated to the continuing rhetorical support of the Palestinians and to fostering relations with other Middle Eastern powers. In particular, India’s relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia have both been strengthened alongside growing Indo-Israeli ties.²¹⁴

India continues to take a pro-Palestinian stance. When India established relations with Israel, New Delhi made it clear that this would not dilute its traditional support for the Palestinians. While India has tended to tone down its rhetoric in recent years, by acknowledging the responsibility of each side during times of violence, for instance, and calling for negotiations, India still tends to support the Palestinian cause in international forums.²¹⁵ With two exceptions—voting in 1991 to repeal the 1975 Indian-sponsored resolution of the UN General Assembly, which equated Zionism with racism, and again in resisting Arab pressure to vote on a similar measure in Durban 2001—India has

²¹¹ Keinon, “Indo-Israeli Ties.”

²¹² “Statewise Population of India,” India Online, accessed October 12, 2014, <http://www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/state-wise-population-of-india.html>; “The World Factbook: Country Comparison: Population,” Central Intelligence Agency, accessed October 12, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html?countryname=India&countrycode=in®ionCode=sas&rank=2#in>

²¹³ Aaron, *Straddling Faultlines*, 6.

²¹⁴ Kumaraswamy, *India’s Israel Policy*, 261.

²¹⁵ Pant, “Re-Assessment of Priorities,” 264.

generally continued to vote in favor of Palestine in international forums.²¹⁶ In 2011, India co-sponsored a draft security council resolution that called Israeli settlements illegal.²¹⁷ With the BJP's rise to power, support for the Palestinians is creating some dissonance between India's foreign policy and domestic politics. India backed calls for a UN investigation into Israel's recent Operation Protective Edge, but the BJP blocked a Parliamentary measure condemning Israel's actions.²¹⁸ This may be sign of a broader change in India's pro-Palestinian stance, or it may just be a product of the vagaries of domestic politics.

Indo-Iranian relations have created a precarious balance in India's foreign policy. New Delhi shares a number of interests with Tehran. With Iran being one of the world's largest energy suppliers and India being one of the largest energy consumers, there are significant interests for both sides in expanding trade. Apart from oil, Iran is a potential partner in coping with the threats emanating out of Pakistan. Both powers share an interest in the stability of Afghanistan and have remained opposed to a Pakistani-friendly Taliban. India and Iran signed a New Delhi Declaration during the same year of Sharon's visit, in which they expressed concern of U.S. unilateralism and promised to expand cooperation in trade and defense.²¹⁹

Furthermore, India depends on Iran for access to Central Asia. New Delhi looks to Central Asia, along with the Gulf, to supply its energy needs, and seeks to counter Pakistani influence in the region. Both India and Iran hope to expand trade with the region through the North-South Transit Corridor, which will allow trade from Indian ports through Iranian ports, then via rail to the Caspian Sea and on to Europe and Russia.²²⁰ India's investments into the development of the Iranian port of Chabahar and

²¹⁶ Kumaraswamy, "Maturation of Indo-Israeli Ties," 40.

²¹⁷ Rajiv, "Delicate Balance," 133.

²¹⁸ Kanishk Tharoor, "Why Modi's India Aligns More Closely with Israel than with Palestinians," *Al-Jazeera America*, August 3, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/8/3/modi-israel-relations.html>

²¹⁹ C. Christine Fair, "India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 148–150.

²²⁰ C. Christine Fair, "Indo-Iranian Ties: Thicker than Oil," GLORIA Center, March 9, 2007, <http://www.gloria-center.org/2007/03/fair-2007-03-09/>

into the railway extending out from this port is indicative of the future importance of Iranian facilitated trade.²²¹

Nevertheless, India and Israel share the goal of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, and India has offered support to the sanctions regime, including voting against Iran multiple times at the IAEA. India maintains that the IAEA is the rightful authority for ensuring this and is strongly opposed to a military solution, which would jeopardize oil supplies and Indian citizens working in the Gulf.²²²

Due to the sanctions regime imposed on Iran as part of international efforts to restrain its nuclear program, India's dependence on Iranian oil has lessened in recent years—Iranian oil only made up 6 percent of India's oil imports in 2013, down from 12 percent in 2011—but this is not likely to be a long-term development.²²³ With Iran's hydrocarbon resources and India's energy demand, these ties will undoubtedly be reinvigorated in the future. Also, their convergence of interests in Afghanistan will only grow in scope as NATO troops are pulled out, and Iran will continue to provide India with an important source of access to Central Asia.

While Indo-Iranian ties may have subsided in recent years due to the international isolation that Iran's nuclear program has brought, India's ties with Saudi Arabia have strengthened. Beyond being India's largest source of oil and having close to two million Indian citizens working in its borders, Riyadh also has the potential to serve as a counterweight to Pakistan in the Islamic world. However, this relationship faces its own constraints. Saudi Arabia continues to have a close relationship with Islamabad, and there is a concern that Saudi money continues to finance terrorists groups that attack India.²²⁴

India's pursuit of balance in foreign policy extends beyond bilateral relations. While Israel expects to benefit from a unipolar world in which the United States is the predominant power, India prefers a multipolar world in which it is able to exercise an

²²¹ Zur, Magal, and Kedem, "Growing Power of the Indian Navy," 105.

²²² Rajiv, "Delicate Balance," 133–134.

²²³ "EIA Country Report: India," Cheema, "India's Iran-Israel Balancing Act."

²²⁴ Pant, "Re-Assessment of Priorities," 257–258.

autonomous foreign policy. Even with the U.S. “pivot” to Asia, New Delhi is reluctant to enter into an alliance with Washington because it does not want to provoke Beijing and fears that a formal alliance may limit its own freedom of maneuver in the event of conflict with China.²²⁵

G. INDIA AND THE ARAB SPRING

As India’s economic growth increases its aspirations for great power status, such as India’s ambition for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, there are growing domestic and international expectations for India to play a larger role in the world. These expectations have been significantly tempered, however, by India’s response to the Arab Spring and the ongoing Syrian Civil War.

Throughout the early developments of the Arab Spring, India’s reaction was muted. The two primary factors driving India’s response were ensuring the safety of its citizens working in the region and an unwillingness to take a position counter to the Arab powers. Thus, New Delhi tended to wait until its citizens were safe and an Arab consensus was reached before articulating a position.²²⁶ Libya was the only case in which India was forced to evacuate its citizens, but in the case of both Egypt and Libya, the need to be able to work with the regimes in the event of evacuation severely limited India’s ability to be critical of the regimes.²²⁷

While thousands of Indian expatriates work in North Africa, millions work in the Persian Gulf. Apart from the extraordinary logistical effort it would take to evacuate these citizens, the socio-economic consequences of bringing these workers home would be traumatic.²²⁸ These factors explain why India remained silent when protests broke out in the Gulf.

Regarding Syria, India has voted against the Security Council resolutions calling for regime change, has avoided backing opposition forces, and has refused to join the

²²⁵ “India as a Great Power.”

²²⁶ Kumaraswamy, *Reading the Silence*, 32.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31, 35.

U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State (IS), despite burgeoning U.S.-Indo ties. New Delhi's policy of non-interference is driven by a number of factors: a concern about Western intervention causing further instability, a perception of a secular regime being attacked by Islamic extremists, and a reluctance to play the role of mediator when success is so unlikely.²²⁹

It is difficult to say what this may mean for Indo-Israeli relations in the future. Israel, like India, fears the spread of Islamist violence in any form. Both are ultimately status quo powers that depend on regional stability for their own security. Democratic forces unleashed by popular uprisings would likely result in a region more hostile to Israeli interests. Also, the increased power of non-state actors threatens Israeli security. Thus, India's muted response does not run counter to Israeli interests. At the same time, India's passive reaction indicates that New Delhi would be severely limited in its ability to help Israel in times of crisis due to its dependence on Arab states. Thus, the strategic advantage of Indo-Israel relations for Tel Aviv cannot be seen as a means to directly address regional threats.

H. CONCLUSION: A GROWING PARTNERSHIP BUT NO ALLIANCE

A number of trends point to a strengthening of the Indo-Israeli partnership. Islamic terrorism is a growing threat to India. In 2014, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of Al-Qaeda, called for the establishment of an al-Qaeda branch inside of India in an attempt to exploit the tensions between Indian Hindus and Muslims. Domestic opinion is responding to this growing threat of extremism. In a recent poll, Indians were among the nationalities most likely to perceive extremist groups as a major threat.²³⁰ India's perception of the strategic utility of an Indian-Israeli partnership will likely follow the growing concern of Islamic extremism. The 20,000 strong pro-Israeli rally in the Indian city of Kolkata during the latest round of Israeli-Hamas hostilities indicates how a shared

²²⁹ Josi, "India's Isolationism."

²³⁰ Neha Sahgal, "Indians among Most Likely in the World to See Extremist Groups as 'Major Threat,'" Pew Research Center, September 10, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/10/indians-among-most-likely-in-the-world-to-see-extremist-groups-as-major-threat/>

security environment can create a sense of solidarity between populations that might otherwise appear to have little in common.²³¹

Beyond a common threat perception, growing economic relations and the rise of the BJP, a traditional Israeli ally, has already demonstrated some promising signs for the future of Indo-Israeli relations. During the recent meeting between Prime Minister's Netanyahu and Modi, Netanyahu declared that "sky is the limit" for future relations.²³²

Despite these developments, India faces some very real constraints. India shares a number of common interests with Iran, Israel's primary adversary, and these interests will only grow as the situation in Afghanistan evolves and as India attempts to extend its reach into Central Asia. In the Gulf, India's dependence on oil and the millions of its citizens working in these countries compels New Delhi to maintain good relations with the ruling parties and to back regional stability at great cost. As seen by its recent inaction, India has no desire to get involved in the Middle East beyond what is necessary to protect its immediate interests, particularly Indian expatriate laborers.

Furthermore, India and Israel do not share a common enemy. While they may share similar security environments and types of threats, both sides are careful not to portray Indo-Israeli cooperation as directed against any certain party. Neither power wants to get embroiled in the other's regional conflicts. Israel is reluctant to make an enemy out of Pakistan and enjoys budding relations with China. Conversely, India's considerable interests in the Middle East and Central Asia dictate its relations with the Arab states and Iran.²³³

All of these factors place constraints on the relationship, but these constraints should not obscure how far Indo-Israeli relations have come over the past two decades. For nearly half a century India avoided establishing relations with the Jewish state. In the two decades since this position was reversed, Indo-Israeli relations have improved

²³¹ Amanda Borschel-Dan, "20,000 March in Kolkata in Show of Support for Israel," *Times of Israel*, August 17, 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/20000-march-in-kolkata-in-show-of-support-for-israel/>

²³² Devirupa Mitra, "Sky's the Limit: Israel PM tells Modi in First PM-Level Meeting in a Decade," *New India Express*, September 29, 2014, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/express-in-america/Skys-the-Limit-Israel-PM-tells-Modi-in-first-PM-level-Meeting-in-a-Decade/2014/09/29/article2455133.ece>

²³³ Inbar, "Indian-Israeli Entente," 94.

dramatically. It is important to keep the size of each nation in perspective. With a population of eight million, as compared to India's 1.2 billion, and with India's projected economic growth, the subcontinent promises to remain an important Israeli market well into the future, particularly relevant at a time when Israel faces a growing sanctions movement in Europe.²³⁴ The defense trade that keeps Israel's defense sector competitive has significant strategic implications. Finally, with a population that is increasingly sympathetic to Israel's security concerns, there is the potential for India to offer greater support to the Jewish state within the bounds of its domestic and foreign constraints.

²³⁴ "World Factbook."

V. CONCLUSION: TIPPING THE BALANCE

In a May 2014 interview, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed the need for Israel to diversify relations in light of becoming increasingly isolated by Europe: “Israel is rapidly developing relations in Asia. . . . These countries want to seize the future, and they recognize that the only way they can win is to innovate, and Israel is one of the great centers of innovation in the world.”²³⁵ Netanyahu was not necessarily describing a new trend in Israeli diplomacy, but, rather, an effort that began in earnest at the end of the Cold War, when many nations seized the opportunity to establish official diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

Turkey, India, and China were all part of these post-Cold War changes, which, among other things, ushered in a new era of relations with Israel. In the quarter century that followed, each of these states’ relations with Israel has evolved along different paths. For the Asian giants, Israeli technology and security cooperation provided a means to address development challenges, assist with military modernization, and better cope with their security environments. For Ankara, a Turkish-Israeli alliance provided a direct and immediate means to deal with its most pressing security problems.

Some factors driving stronger relations have waned, but the importance of trade with Israel persists for all three powers. Their rise to power has been characterized by maintaining a level of economic prosperity that is qualitatively different than what their populations are used to. Maintaining economic growth has come, in part, from developing new trade ties and decoupling economic and political relations, allowing these relations to develop along separate trajectories. If these states continue to embrace this model, then, at the very least, economic relations with Israel should continue unfettered, but this will not necessarily translate to political support.

²³⁵ Jeffrey Goldberg, “Netanyahu Says Obama Got Syria Right,” *Bloomberg View*, May 22, 2014, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-05-22/netanyahu-says-obama-got-syria-right>

A. BALANCING DOMESTIC PRIORITIES WITH REGIONAL RELATIONS

Cooperation with Israel is affected by an unusually wide range of political, military, and other considerations. Initially, security cooperation was the driver behind Israel's new found ties with all three powers. The desire to increase the capability of defense establishments—through advanced technology, intelligence sharing, or joint exercises—drove the powers to establish closer ties with the Israeli Defense Force. At the same time, fear of offending Muslim opinion, international and domestic, and concerns about ties with Israel affecting relations with other regional powers limited the visibility of relations and inhibited these states from supporting Israel at international forums.

Still, these concerns about the publicity of relations have not necessarily limited their strength. In the case of each state's relations with Israel, it is important to separate the rhetoric from the reality. While all three powers have continued to espouse support for the Palestinian cause, deepening ties with Israel has developed alongside this rhetoric. Many times, the state's actual policy towards Israel has been much different than its stance in international forums or rhetoric regarding Israeli-Palestinian hostilities may imply.

Through strengthening the military, helping cope with security challenges, and providing necessary civilian and military technology, cooperation with Israel has helped each state overcome some of their challenges in their rise to power. In so doing, relations with Israel have helped these states “seize the future” by enabling them to address domestic priorities, from economic growth and national security to resource challenges.

Conversely, partnering with Israel is likely to affect domestic Muslim opinion in each country and relations with other Middle Eastern powers, particularly during periods of heightened regional tensions. There is a delicate balance to maintain between reaping the rewards from cooperation with Israel, while avoiding any potential blowback. For each of these powers, maintaining this balance has manifested itself in a distorted policy, where economic relations and security cooperation have grown, while the powers remain rhetorically and politically opposed to Israeli interests in international venues and during times of crises between Israelis and Palestinians.

The future of Israel's relations with these rising powers will be defined by the weight each nation continues to give to the factors that drove a strengthening of relations and those that tempered their relations with the Jewish state. No less important, developments in the Israeli-Palestinian situation can either open room for greater engagement with Tel Aviv or keep relations developing along the status quo, where economic relations and, possibly, security cooperation persist alongside political opposition.

B. FACTORS DRIVING STRONGER RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

Cooperation with Israel offers the potential for strengthening one's military power. For India and China, this primarily comes in the form of military technology, but they also stand to gain from cooperation with Israel on counter-terrorism techniques and practices on effectively securing borders. These military advantages apply to Turkey too, but because the two share the same neighborhood, cooperation with Israel also can help directly address regional threats.

For Turkey, an alliance with Israel has proven itself useful as a source of leverage over regional powers and as a means to procure advanced military technology. These were both decisive factors in Turkey's fight against the PKK insurgency during the 1990s. Israel was a key source of western technology at a time when the United States and European Union restricted arms sales to Turkey, and a Turkish-Israeli alliance proved useful in compelling Syria to capitulate to its demands of quitting support of the PKK and solving the states' territorial dispute. The utility of a Turkish-Israeli alliance faded as Ankara experienced a rapprochement with Damascus and sought a new approach to the region, but the volatile security environment that has emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring may compel the two powers to overcome their differences.

Syria is once again a source of concern for both Turkey and Israel. The Syrian Civil War ended Turkey's spell of good relations with Assad's regime, and the chaos that has ensued since the war broke out represents a common threat to both countries. Israel has superior intelligence-gathering capabilities, and both defense forces would be more effective at addressing potential threats by coordinating their actions and sharing

intelligence. The two strongest militaries in the region—whose nations share a border with a failed state that is breeding extremism—would do well to work together. Domestic changes inside of Turkey may inhibit Turkish-Israeli cooperation from approximating what it was during the 1990s, but both states stand to gain from some level of collaboration.

Defense cooperation is not the only source of ties between the two regional powers. Trade between Israel and Turkey has continued to grow, despite the political and strategic situations that have affected their relationship. The discovery of gas fields off of Israel's coast offers the potential to further deepen economic relations. In terms of volume consumed, natural gas is the most important source of energy for Turkey, but the state is almost exclusively reliant on imports to meet its demand, with Russia and Iran accounting for over three-quarters of these imports. Israeli natural gas would help mitigate Ankara's reliance on Russia and Iran and would further the government's plans for making Turkey a hub for natural gas exports.²³⁶

For China and India, the Israeli technology that Netanyahu spoke of as a diplomatic asset is one of the most important aspect of ties with Israel, which both Asian powers have used for military modernization, addressing development challenges, and in the transition to becoming innovators of goods.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Israeli arms sales were an important source of military technology for China. Defense relations have subsided due to the restrictions the United States put in place in the wake of the Phalcon and Harpy controversies, but despite the end of defense trade, economic relations between the two states have continued to grow, reaching \$8 billion annually. While the export of military technology still faces U.S.-imposed obstacles, Israeli civilian technology has only grown in importance as Beijing seeks to overcome challenges regarding food production, water resources, and a growing energy demand. Moreover, as China attempts to transition to becoming an innovator of goods, Israeli technology will take on an entirely new significance.

²³⁶ "EIA Country Report: Turkey," United States Energy Information Agency, last modified April 17, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=tu>

While Israeli defense ties with Turkey and China have subsided for different reasons, Indo-Israeli security cooperation is robust and growing. Israeli military technology has been a central piece of defense ties since the two states first established diplomatic relations in 1992. At the time, Israel was able to help India upgrade its Soviet equipment and incorporate western technology into its arsenal. Israel's importance as an arms supplier increased at the turn of the century, when many Western powers restricted technology exports to India due to its nuclear weapons program and when Israel proved itself as a reliable arms supplier during the 1999 Kargil War. Furthermore, the Phalcon deal—which, unlike in the case of China, Washington allowed to go through—demonstrated that the United States would not subject Indo-Israeli arms sales to the same level of restriction as Israel's defense trade with China.

Indo-Israeli security cooperation has a number of features that speak to the strength of bilateral relations. New Delhi and Tel Aviv are engaged in multiple projects involving joint cooperation, capitalizing on each state's comparative advantages and demonstrating a great degree of trust and expectation for future cooperation. Moreover, defense ties have not been limited to one particular field but have ranged from border security and counter-terrorism measures to the maritime and space domains.

A number of developments point to a further strengthening of Indo-Israeli ties. New Delhi is undertaking a program of massive military build-up to deal with the potential threats of China, Pakistan, and Islamic terrorism. Israeli arms sales will likely grow as India's defense budget grows. Moreover, with extremism on the rise in the Middle East and al-Qaeda announcing the establishment of a branch inside of India, the threat of Islamic terrorism on the subcontinent is becoming more poignant. Israel possesses extensive experience and capabilities in dealing with this type of threat and has already demonstrated itself as a capable partner by supporting India in its fight against the insurgency in Kashmir. Coping with a common threat has helped create a sense of solidarity between the two states' populations, and the Hindu nationalist party that just won control of the government is a traditional supporter of enhanced relations with the Jewish state.

C. FACTORS TEMPERING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

Although closer cooperation with Israel offers a number of advantages, the three powers share concerns about the way relations with Israel could undermine relations with Israel's Middle Eastern neighbors. Arab oil has grown in importance for China and India as they attempt to satisfy their growing energy demand. Economic interests alone do not give Arab powers any great degree of leverage over these rising powers' regional policies, but trade has driven a level of political involvement. Turkey must be more concerned about how relations with Israel will directly affect its ability to exercise soft power as a means to gain regional influence.

Under the leadership of the AKP, Ankara began to advocate a policy of regional integration, which was a reversal of its past security-dominated foreign policy. Turkey sought to move beyond the perception of its Arab neighbors as potential threats, increase economic relations with all regional parties, and gain influence through soft power. Under this new paradigm, anti-Israeli rhetoric provided a means for the Turkish leadership to increase their domestic and regional popularity. Israel's 2008 Operation Cast Lead marked a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations as Prime Minister Erdogan strongly and publicly condemned Israeli actions. The 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident brought the states' brewing animosity to a crescendo and marked a low point in Turkish-Israeli relations.

Turkey's plans for regional integration were severely hampered by the Arab Spring. Early support of the Muslim Brotherhood and criticism of the military coup has left it at odds with the new government in Egypt and with other Sunni powers that see the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat. Assad's brutal oppression of the opposition in Syria put an end to the partnership between Ankara and Damascus. Still, there are signs of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy making a comeback. Due primarily to energy concerns, there has been a warming of ties between Ankara and Baghdad and between Ankara and Tehran. Moreover, Ahmet Davutoglu, largely seen as the architect of the policy of regional integration, was elected prime minister in August 2014.²³⁷

²³⁷ Lindenstrauss and Avraham, "Turkey Returning to 'Zero Problems.'"

Alongside these foreign policy developments, Turkish domestic changes have created further obstacles to Turkish-Israeli ties. The structural changes that came as a part of the EU accession process limited the military's influence on Turkish foreign policy. Security cooperation had provided the foundation for enhanced ties between the two powers, so this was a significant setback for bilateral relations, which eventually resulted in the end of joint training between the two militaries. Also, the population has gained a stronger voice in foreign policy matters. The Turkish parliament's refusal to allow the United States to use Turkish territory to launch an invasion into Iraq in 2003 reflected this change. The pro-Palestinian sentiment of the population presents a serious impediment to the reinvigoration of Turkish-Israeli relations.

China does not have the same domestic concerns tempering relations with Israel, except for sensitivity to the issue of the suppression of Uyghur separatists being seen through the prism of enhanced relations with the Jewish state. The main factor tempering China's relations with Israel is its relations with other Middle Eastern powers. China received 52 percent of its crude oil imports from the region in 2013, and its reliance on Middle Eastern oil will only grow as economic growth increases its energy demands.²³⁸

However, this factor alone does not have any specific repercussions for Sino-Israeli relations. The Persian Gulf states are not in a position to hold China's regional policies hostage to oil supplies. China has sought to create interdependence between itself and the Middle Eastern states through investments, Chinese exports, and support in international forums. Middle Eastern oil and Israeli technology are both integral to the economic growth that the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has come to depend upon, and being forced to choose between the two would be inherently detrimental to China's economic growth.

While these economic interests alone do not temper relations with Israel, economic relations have driven a level of political involvement. The Chinese Arab Cooperation Forum was set up in 2004 to foster economic and political cooperation between China and the 21 members of the Arab League. Political cooperation is

²³⁸ "EIA Country Report: China."

predicated on mutual support in areas that include “China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, South-South Cooperation, the One China Principle, and support for Arab political causes, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict.”²³⁹ Beijing is a historical supporter of the Palestinian cause, and its rhetorical support has not waned as Sino-Israeli relations have strengthened. While Middle Eastern powers have demonstrated their willingness to accept growing economic relations between Israel and China, Beijing would subvert its own regional influence if it offered political support to the Jewish state.

India's relations in the region are similar to China's, but Indo-Iranian ties, a significant amount of citizens working in the region, and a substantial domestic Muslim population are further factors tempering relations with Israel. Beyond economic interests, Indo-Iranian ties are of growing significance to New Delhi as a means to access Central Asia and to counter Pakistani influence in the region, which will only grow in importance as NATO troops withdraw from Afghanistan. Iran's international isolation has not left it in a position to have any leverage over Indo-Israeli relations, but if the P5+1 and Tehran reach a deal over its nuclear program that brings this isolation to an end, New Delhi's and Tehran's overlapping interests could affect India's cooperation with Israel.

New Delhi must also concern itself with the millions of its citizens earning a living in the region. While concerns about Indian expatriate workers do not have a direct impact on Indo-Israeli relations, these citizens are New Delhi's immediate concerns when conflict erupts in the region. India must work with Arab regimes to ensure the safety of its citizens or coordinate their evacuation. Thus, in a time of crisis, New Delhi would be constrained in its ability to offer support to Israel and must oppose any type of action that would upset regional stability.

India also has a significant Muslim population, which further compels the persistence of India's support for the Palestinian cause. Although these voters' concerns have not affected the existence of relations since they were officially established in 1992, they have affected the visibility of relations and are a further obstacle to India's ability to offer support to Israel in international forums.

²³⁹ *Hearing before the Commission*, 8 (statement of Murphy).

D. REGIONAL STABILITY AND REGIONAL INFLUENCE

Although Turkey, India, and China represent the range of relations with Washington—from a NATO ally to a quasi-partner to a potential rival—the role the United States plays in ensuring regional stability is central to them all. All three powers benefit from the role the United States plays in maintaining stability but do not want to be seen as acquiescing to a U.S.-enforced order. Political support of Israel would be complementary to the U.S. role. However, as rising powers, these states are keen to demonstrate an independent foreign policy, and, especially in the case of China, political support of Arab powers serves as means to win these Middle Eastern regimes over to supporting their own political priorities.

As the volatile regional dynamics make developing a coherent regional policy challenging, stronger ties with Israel could help give shape to each of their regional policies. Enhanced political relations with Israel offer the potential for a degree of influence over Tel Aviv's policies, which, in turn, offers the potential to play a role in addressing some of the region's most contentious problems. Playing the role of mediator is a means to gain regional influence, but it necessitates maintaining good relations with both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

E. NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PEACE

Israel's new relations have done a lot to strengthen the power of the nation. From increasing the state's prosperity through trade to helping maintain its qualitative military edge through international arms sales, Israel has undoubtedly benefitted from diversifying its relations in the post-Cold War era. However, none of this will be a substitute for finding an equitable and viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

If anything, the evolution of Israel's relationship with these three powers demonstrates the limits as much as the strengths of Israeli diplomacy. From opposition to the Israeli separation barrier, the building of new settlements in the West Bank, and the Gaza blockade to support of Palestine's bid for observer status at the UN, the three

powers have remained opposed to Israeli interests in almost every issue regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite enhanced relations with the Jewish state.²⁴⁰

The positive turn in Arab-Israeli hostilities at the end of the Cold War was part of the environment that enabled these powers to establish relations with Israel in the first place. Of the three, the Turkish-Israeli relationship has been the most susceptible to the developments of the peace process, but all three powers have had relations with Israel constrained by the persistence of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities. For the time being, as these rising powers continue to value the economic relations and security cooperation that assisted with their rise, the precarious balance of enhanced economic relations and security cooperation with Israel can exist alongside their political opposition to Israeli interests. However, if Israel comes to be seen as a partner in peace, this may be enough to tip the balance toward a stronger partnership with Turkey, India, and China.

²⁴⁰ Miller, "Stock in Trade."

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