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Israel-Palestine Conflict: Sharonism Rampant

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1. The Zeevi Invasion

US President George W. Bush changed the rules of international engagement on the evening of 11 September 2001. In response to the horrible attacks on New York City and Washington DC, Bush rejected the slow wisdom of justice for the impatient brutality of revenge. "Either you are with us," Bush said to the world community, "or you are against us." Those who do not assist the United States government in its quest to uproot the forces of terror will themselves be seen as terrorists.

On 5 October 2001, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sent tanks and troops of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) into Hebron in the West Bank. The incursion into Palestinian Authority (PA) controlled land of what was once the Occupied Territories came as a result of an escalation of provocations from the Israeli government against the Palestinians. Sharon offered the same logic as Bush – either the PA is with the Israeli government in its attempt to repress all forms of militancy (now labeled terrorism) or else the PA is a legitimate target. If the Taliban can be overthrown to get Osama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida, then so can the PA. Even as PA chairman Yasser Arafat backed the US war against Afghanistan that began two days later, and even as radical Palestinians accepted this posture in the name of Palestinian unity, the IDF continued its onslaught. One provocation followed another.[\[i\]](#)

The most important event that led to the current crisis was the IDF assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa, the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (the Marxist-Leninist formation from 1968 and, until February 2002, a key part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, PLO). The IDF fired two missiles into Abu Ali Mustafa's office in Ramallah, not far from the office of Arafat, on 27 August 2001. The IDF is famous for its policy of "targeted killings," in other words, the assassination of leaders and militants of organizations that it dislikes. Rabah Muhana, of the PFLP, in grief, warned the world, "We will seek to target and harm Israeli criminal leaders to respond to the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa and to block further Israeli attacks on Palestinian leaders." On 17 October, the PFLP kept its word with the spectacular assassination of Sharon's most right-wing cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi. Even as the PA condemned the assassination ("We feel sorry about this assassination. We reject all forms of political assassinations," said PA cabinet minister Yasser Abed Rabbo), Sharon blamed the PA, "The responsibility is Arafat's alone, as someone who has carried out and is carrying out acts of terrorism and never took steps against it." Even as the

IDF fired the first shot, Sharon's cabinet secretary Gideon Saar told the press that if Arafat did not hand over the PFLP militants, "There will be no choice but to view [the PA] as a state that supports terror and to act against it." The Bush doctrine provided Sharonism with an opportunity to excise the PA and the Palestinians. Sharon promised to "carry out a war to the bitter end against the terrorists." We are now in the midst of just this war.

On 18 October, the IDF killed three Palestinians in a car explosion, and although the IDF had left Hebron on 14 October, they now came back in force into several West Bank towns: Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin and elsewhere. The incursions and assassinations became a full-blown invasion of those areas given over to the Palestinian leadership through the Oslo Accords of 1993. A defiant Sharon ignored international condemnation and promised to invite a million Jews to occupy regions now held by the PA (7 November 2001). Massive IDF force was met by a spate of suicide bombings, as the poorly armed David tried to mount feeble and horrific acts of retaliation against Goliath's US-made and US-aided tanks, helicopters and ordinance.^[ii]

The US offered an early rebuke of IDF actions, first on 5 October (when the White House rejected the Israeli government's assessment that its anti-terrorist Arab coalition was akin to the appeasement of the Nazis), then again on 22 October (when the US State Department's Philip Reeker said, "Israeli defense forces should be withdrawn immediately from all Palestinian-controlled areas, and no further such incursions should be made"). By mid-November, when it became clear that the Fifth Afghan War was a foregone conclusion, the US once again returned to its brazen pro-Israel posture. Certainly, the State Department sent a series of officials to conduct negotiations and to mediate between the two parties, but it did not condemn Sharon's disregard of these attempts (on 20 November, the day after US Secretary of State Colin Powell offered a vision for peace, the IDF razed homes in Gaza and secured an armed settlement in Hebron; three days later, as a US peace mission arrived in Israel, the IDF assassinated a Hamas leader; again, three days after this, Sharon replaced the moderate Israeli negotiator with a Hawk). By early December (on the 3rd to be exact), the White House rejected calls from around the world to condemn Sharon's administration and instead asked that Arafat do more against Palestinian militants. By 11 April 2002, the day before Secretary of State Powell ended his failed trip to Israel and the PA, the White House showed its hand when its spokesman called Sharon a "man of peace" and then said, "Chairman Arafat has yet to earn the President's trust." Sharonism earned the benediction of the White House as his men went forth to erase the Palestinians from the twenty two percent of their pre-1948 lands. If 1948 is known as the *naqba* (catastrophe) among the Palestinians, what might they call 2002?

2. The Meaning of Sharonism.

Angry at the widespread anti-Semitism of many European states and by the pogroms engineered by governments and conducted by their fellow citizens, many European Jews dreamed of a land of their own, far from the outrages of racism. Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896) laid out the argument for a national home, but he thought that Turkey maybe the site; the next year, now President of the World Zionist Organization, he felt that the German Kaiser

might help the Zionists gain a homeland in Palestine. A weak Kaiser being no help, Herzl turned to the British whose Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain told Herzl that he “liked the Zionist idea. If I could show him a spot among the British possessions which was not yet inhabited by white settlers, then we could talk.” Herzl studied the condition of Uganda, Cyprus and the Sinai (as well as Italian Tripoli, Portuguese Mozambique and Belgian Congo) before he settled once more on Palestine.^[iii] Zionism, in this complex incarnation, was a desire for release from European racism, a cry for land as well as a disregard of the people who may occupy the land already (the alliance with colonialism makes this tendency clear). Zionism continues to be an ambivalent social force, rich in its desire for justice (so that socialist Zionism led to the *kibbutzim*, a way to organize society outside the strictures of capitalist relations) and simultaneously in its vision of liberation for the Jewish people at all costs.

Sharonism is Gun Zionism alone, an intolerance that knows no contradiction, only violence. Sharonism’s slogan in 1948 was “A land without people, for a people without land,” a racist denial of the almost seven hundred thousand Arabs who lived along the Levantine coastline.^[iv] Once the Balfour Declaration (1917) revoked the right of the Palestinians to their own land and gave it, in a seemingly magnanimous gesture, to the Jewish people, Sharonism sought to remove the Palestinians from their homeland. During the mandate period, liberal Zionists saw Palestine as a two people state. David Ben-Gurion, as leader of the Jewish Workers’ Party (MAPAI) saw the Arabs as “an organic, inseparable part of Palestine” (1925), so that he told the 17th Zionist Congress, “We declare before world opinion, before the workers’ movement and before the Arab world, that we shall not accept the idea of a Jewish state, which would eventually mean Jewish domination of Arabs in Palestine” (1931). When Ben-Gurion became the Prime Minister of Israel in 1948, however, he ensured that the dispossessed Palestinians roam the earth as exiles with no provision for their “right of return” (the crucial voice vote was taken on 16 June 1948 by the cabinet of the Provisional Government of Israel).^[v] Zionism is at times reduced to Sharonism, although it remains in struggle with its contradictions. Sharonism has no time for contradictions. It begins its active career on 9 April 1948, when Menachem Begin’s Irgun massacred two hundred and fifty-four residents of Deir Yassin.^[vi] Begin followed the racist callousness of Israel’s first President Chaim Weizmann who said that the British informed him, “There are a few hundred thousand Negroes [in pre-1948 Palestine], but that is a matter of no significance.”^[vii] When you render human beings insignificant, it is license to mass murder.

Sharonism has used at least two techniques to remove the Palestinians from the area, its settlements and closure.

(a) Settlements.

The point of Sharonism is to remove the Palestinians from a land that it claims was deeded to the Jews by God. From 1948 to 1967, Sharonism acted cautiously, mainly because any overt attempt to colonize the land would have been met by the united Arab armies, here under the charge of Nasserism. Sharonism lay relatively dormant in these years, but for forays into instances of brutality such as those orchestrated by Ariel Sharon himself at Qibya (when

Sharon's Unit 101 killed at least seventy Palestinians in 1953).^[viii] The IDF's victory in 1967 transformed the Israeli establishment's view of itself. Take Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan as an illustration. In June 1967, Dayan told the troops, "Soldiers of Israel, we have no goals of conquest. Our single purpose is to put to naught the Arab armies' attempt to conquer our land." Then, three years later, he noted that from 1948 to 1967 the establishment had been content with the boundaries of Israel as defined by Gun Zionism, "we had fought to reach the summit; we were content with what we had achieved." With the new aggression of the IDF, "We thought we had reached the summit, but it became clear to us that we were still on the way up the mountain. The summit is higher up."^[ix] The "summit," in sum, is the expulsion of the Palestinians from the vicinity.

From 1967 to 1977, under the Labor governments of Meir and Rabin, the Israeli state built ninety settlements on the West Bank (cost: \$350 million) and rejected the idea of a Palestinian state (when we hear about the PLO's rejection of Israel, we should put it in this context). When Begin of Likud came to power in 1977, he was even more belligerent. "What occupied territories," he said, "If you mean Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, they are liberated territories, part of the land of Israel." Begin brought Ariel Sharon, already famous for his brutality against Arabs in the 1950s, in as his Minister of Agriculture, which was another way to say Minister of Colonization. In June 1979, Sharon offered a preview of his current tactics: "In another year, settlement activity might be impossible. So we must act now - to settle vigorously, quickly. First of all to establish facts of foothold, and then to beautify the settlements, plan them, expand them" (*New York Times*, 16 June 1979). The State put funds toward the creation of the settlements, a policy that inevitably made the Oslo accords of 1993 a failure.

Since Oslo, Sharonism vigorously promoted the construction of the settlements in the three zones bequeathed to the PA. During his first year in office as a man of peace, Ehud Barak in 1999-2000, mainly Sharonists and orthodox Jews constructed almost two thousand settlements; during the reign of the right, Netanyahu, the rate was less (1,160 units in 1997). Between 1993 (Oslo) and 2000 (the al-Aqsa intifada), the total settler population increased from 110,000 to 195,000 or seventy-seven percent. The annual rate of implantation has been 4,200 (from 1967 to 1993) and 12,000 (from 1994 to 2000). To connect these settlements, the Israeli state expropriated land for roads, spent almost \$200 million to build highways and cut down 15,000 trees (many of them in olive groves). Many of these roads, as we shall see below, constrain the movement of the Palestinian population, especially since these are heavily fortified by the IDF to protect the settlers.^[x] Here is Columbia University Professor Edward Said: "The Gaza-based Palestine Center for Human Rights has documented the 'sweepings' of olive groves and vegetable farms by the Israeli army (or, as it prefers to be known, Israel Defense Force) near the Rafah border, for example, and on either side of the Gush Katif settlement block. Gush Katif is an area of Gaza - about 40 percent - occupied by a few thousand settlers, who can water their lawns and fill their swimming pools, while the 1 million Palestinian inhabitants of the strip (800,000 of them refugees from former Palestine) live in a parched, water-free zone." The Israeli state controls the water supply of the occupied territories and is able to

conduct a water war against the Palestinians just as they conduct a land war. [\[xi\]](#)

(b) Closure.

After Oslo, in March 1993, the IDF began a policy called “closure” to enclose the Palestinians into a Bantustan type arrangement. Israel holds the key to Palestinian survival because almost eighty percent of the Palestinian trade is with Israel. If the borders are closed, the people starve. From 1993, the Israeli state insisted that Palestinians carry a permit to enter Israel (whereas from 1967 there had been no such provision) and in 1998, the Israeli state only allowed married men and women over twenty three to obtain permits. With routine checkpoints and harassment, getting to work became a serious problem for the Palestinians. Sara Roy calculates that between 1993 and 1996, the Israeli government imposed 342 days (Gaza) and 291 days (West Bank) of total closure. In 1996, as a result of closure, Gaza’s GNP slipped by almost forty percent while that of the West Bank by almost twenty percent. The World Bank noted, “The annual costs of closure and permit policies at about 11-18 percent of GNI [Gross National Income] in the West Bank and 31-40 percent in the Gaza Strip for the period 1994-96.” [\[xii\]](#)

In the decade before the al-Aqsa Intifada, Sara Roy shows us how the Oslo ghetto has devastated the everyday lives of Palestinians: unemployment during the 1990s rose nine fold between 1992 and 1996, real gross GNP fell by over eighteen percent and real per capita GNP fell by an even more dramatic thirty seven percent. “The reasons for Palestinian economic regression,” Roy argues, “are many and interrelated but turn on one primary axis: Israel’s closure policy, which restricts and at times bans the movement of labor and goods from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip to Israel, to each other, and to external markets, represents the single most deleterious factor shaping the nature of Palestinian economic activity and Palestinian life in general” [\[xiii\]](#)

Roy offers one more indication of Sharonism: separation. In 1999 Ehud Barak ran on the platform, “Peace Through Separation: We Are Here; They Are There.” Checkpoints, walls, fences, trenches, bridges, canals and tunnels formed the pieces of Barak’s vision and its crowning glory was an electrified fence around the Gaza Strip. From March 2001, when Sharon came to power he set the IDF in motion to dig two meter trenches to close off the 65,000 people who live in Ramallah – cutting them off, as Roy notes, “not only from work but from hospitals, health clinics, and schools.” [\[xiv\]](#)

The point of closure (and separation) is to inflict significant pain on the Palestinian people so that they may leave the moth-eaten state of the PA for greener pastures.

On 29 September 2000, Ariel Sharon, with a thousand IDF guards, visited the mosque at al-Aqsa in PA controlled East Jerusalem to “inspect and ascertain that freedom of worship and free access to the Temple Mount is granted to everyone.” The vulgarity of Sharon’s test of freedom when the Palestinians are held in captivity did not escape the young people who inaugurated the most recent uprising, the al-Aqsa Intifada. It arose, Sara Roy notes, “in response to Israel’s continued attempt to fragment and weaken the Palestinian community

through dispossession, denial and closure.”[\[xv\]](#)

In search of a pretext, the IDF took the assassination of Zeevi as the pretext for its inhuman assault on the Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories, sometimes euphemistically called the PA. The Oslo Accords that produced this sham of freedom did not change the fundamental relationship between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people – one of colonial domination in all aspects of life. What the PA had was the right to manage only a short list of subjects, in a sense similar to most of the comprador regimes that worked under the heel of the colonial master. But people with a long history of struggle, who chaff at the bit placed on them by the US and the Israeli state, staff the PA. From the standpoint of the Israeli state, any motion on their part is tantamount to terrorism.

Devastated by the 1967 war, the Palestinians regrouped in Jordan, began raids on Israel, and then faced the wrath of King Hussein’s Bedouin army and Brigadier Zia ul-Haq’s Pakistani army (27 September 1970): King Hussein, son of the first king of Jordan installed by the British in 1921 and grandson of Emir Hussein of Mecca, thwarted the strategy of PFLP leader George Habash, “The liberation of Palestine will come through Amman [capital of Jordan].” The PLO fled to Beirut, to take shelter in Lebanese liberalism. Ruled by the Christian-fascist Falange, Lebanon made a deal with Sharon to kick out the PLO from its base. “We are here to destroy once and for all the PLO terrorists,” said Sharon on 12 June 1982 and a few months later, on 16 September, the IDF, under his command, urged and equipped the Falange to enter the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila and massacre at least three thousand five hundred people. Begin, of Irgun fame, refused to conduct an inquiry and blamed the events on “the bloodthirsty plot being hatched against Israel and its government.” Four hundred thousand people protested in Tel Aviv on 25 September and forced the regime to form the Kahane Commission (whose report relieved Begin of “a certain degree of responsibility” and called for the dismissal of Sharon and of Raphael Eytan, which did not happen -- both became members of the Knesset and then Sharon was elevated to the top post in the land).

The PLO fled to Tunisia and waited there, in a relatively quiet exile, until the 1987 Intifada erupted (along with Hamas) and brought the Israelis to the table in Spain and then in Oslo to allow the PLO to return. For Sharonism, the return of the PLO was a hiatus – its departure was always on the cards. When all reasonable opposition is squashed, what else must come but the suicide bomber? The suicide bomber is not a result of some malady in Palestinian or Islamic culture, but it is the end result of an ill-fated policy since 1967 to render the Palestinians without the means to craft their destiny. This is not to say that the Israeli people deserve what they get. Far from it, it is to say that Sharonism produced the terrible social conditions that led to this impasse. Sharonism, via the Jordanian army, the Falange and the IDF, went after the left Palestinians, thereby creating a vacuum filled earnestly by groups like Hamas. Sharonism is the end of debate, because it went after reasonable people with its weapons, produced a desert of political opinion, and then used that as an excuse for further barbarity. Meanwhile, the Palestinians continue to suffer and the US pities Sharon for his dilemma.

Meanwhile, children stuck within homes, afraid that they will be the next martyrs in the crossfire, memorize the poems of Mahmoud Darwish...

I saw nothing but a scaffold
With one single rope for two million necks
I see armed cities of paper that bristle
With kings and khaki

3. The US-Israeli Union.

The architect of Sharonism is not just Sharon, but also US neoconservatives like Irving Kristol, who just over a decade ago wrote, "A Palestinian state in Gaza would be nothing more than an armed camp for intransigent irredentists who would be at permanent war with Israel. Why should Israel agree to any such scenario? It won't, since it would only end up having to occupy Gaza all over again. The million or so Palestinian refugees -- by now mainly children and grandchildren of the original refugees -- did not come from the West Bank, have no family connections on the West Bank, have no memories of the West Bank."[\[xvi\]](#) These Palestinians, in words similar to Golda Meir, have no right to belong, since they don't exist. This is the ideology of Fortress Israel -- barricade oneself behind the IDF and inflict enormous pain on anyone who may try to resist your armed might. This is all very well as a Sharonist doctrine for those who live in Israel, but why does the US support Israel regardless of its outlaw actions (against Resolution 242 of the UN that asks it to leave the Occupied Territories) and the difficult position it leaves the US's Arab allies in the region?

Drawing from the cultural images of anti-Semitism, some speculate that it is the "Jewish Lobby" in the US that is to blame. Not only is this factually hard to verify, but it does not sit well for a Marxist framework (groups do not simply *buy* their influence, as the liberals argue, but certain classes exercise *control* over the state form and its managers structurally operate on behalf of or at the behest of the dominant classes). As most electoral and campaign dollar data shows, the "Jewish Lobby" tends to lean toward the Democratic Party, so why do the Republicans operate on behalf of Israel as well?[\[xvii\]](#) The Republican Party has very close ties to the petro-Sheikhs, mainly because it is a party soaked with oil money and oily men: from Bush and Cheney downwards. Bush's Energy Secretary, Spencer Abraham, is an Arab American (the first ever) and Bush has a long history of friendship and partnership with Arab businessmen. In 1990, Bush made almost a million dollars in a deal bankrolled by the emirate of Bahrain (Harken, a tiny Texas company that had Bush on its board, won a contract in Bahrain against the giant Amaco, mainly because of Bush's contacts with his father, the then President).[\[xviii\]](#) On the board of Harken, beside Bush, was Talat Othman, recently hauled in for questioning by the US Justice Department for being an important figure in the Islamic charities it had raided. Othman, who offered the benediction at the Republican National Convention in 2000, joined up with Republican strategist Grover Norquist and Khaled Saffuri to create the Islamic Institute to draw conservative Muslims into its orbit. The Bush family and the Republican Party are knee deep in the mire of two kinds of fundamentalism: the market variety

and that peddled by the mullahs and the priests. So why does the US back Israel?

The US, which hitherto had been only a partial “friend” to Israel, became a firm ally after the 1967 war. In 1958, Eisenhower forged a deal with the Saudi regime so that the defense of the peninsula’s autocracy became part of the US’s national interest. The US government made a strategic alliance with the forces of militant Islam to undermine both Communism and Nasserism, mainly to protect the oil lands from the left (and the Soviet Union). Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim’s coup in Baghdad in that same year demonstrated the instability of the US alliance with the monarchies (this would be repeated in Iran twenty years later). When Israel showed that it could be the gendarme of US imperialism, money and military equipment moved to shore it up. Sadat, the liaison between the Egyptian army and the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood, made a bargain with Israel at Camp David (1978) and became the second largest recipient of US aid. The US support for Israel essentially brought this renegade Arab state in line, this *after Egypt defeated Israel in the 1973 war*. [xix] US support for Israel, then, is not just for the preservation of a Jewish State (if it is that at all); it is mainly as a wedge to discipline the petro-Sheikh allies. Additionally, Israel offers US allies like the Sadatian regime in Egypt (now in Mubarak’s hands) the opportunity to pretend to be pro-Palestinian and yet, pro-American: the leadership can fulminate against Israel, tell the “street” that it is with the people (represented among the Arab masses by the Palestinians), just as it stands in line before the trough of US aid. US investment in Israel, therefore, is marked by a measure of pragmatism and racism. Racism because of this widespread establishment idea that the Arab is not to be trusted; pragmatism because if you have one loyal ally in the region, then you can use it to ensure that the others (such as Saudi Arabia) stay in line.

4. Hindutva and Sharonism: Subcontractors of US imperialism.

And why does the Indian government ignore Arafat and stand in silence behind Israel?

On 7 August 1958, Jawaharlal Nehru explained why India had no diplomatic personnel in Israel even as India recognized that country two years before. “This attitude,” he told the Parliament, “was adopted after a careful consideration of the balance of forces. It is not a matter of high principle, but it is based on how we could best serve and be helpful in that area. We should like the problem between Israel and the Arab countries to be settled peacefully. After careful thought we felt that while recognizing Israel as an entity we need not at this stage exchange diplomatic personnel.” No stranger to the dispute, in 1947, the Indian government proposed a plan as a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine to create a federal state with autonomy for the Jewish residents of Palestine. The plan was rejected, and India joined the Arab nations to oppose the partition of the region. Nehru opened the doors to diplomatic association in the 1950s (notably when the Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Walter Eytan, visited India in 1952), but with the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the growth of Arab nationalism, the government remained reluctant to established diplomatic ties. For almost four decades, the Indian government, mainly led by the

Congress, stayed close to Arab nationalism and refused to engage in diplomatic relations with Israel as long as the Arab-Israeli problem remained unsettled.

Then, in 1992, the Congress-led government sent an envoy to Israel and diplomatic relations began in earnest. There are two reasons for the turnabout, one the Congress' entry into the neoliberal regime set-up by the IMF in cahoots with global capital, and two the Congress reassessed the world's power equation in the post-Cold War era and saw itself as a player in the Indian Ocean region, akin to Israel's role as the gendarme of the oil lands on behalf of the US. If Israel could attain semi-world power status by its ruthless foreign policy and lack of concern for the values of non-aligned cooperation, then India, now a pretender on the world stage, should follow the same playbook. But even the Congress-led government was chary about a full-fledged alignment with both the US and Israel, mainly because of deep ties with the Arab world as well as because of economic and military ties with powers that still opposed US imperialism (Russia, for instance).

The ground shifted in 1998 when the Hindu-Right forged a coalition government, exploded nuclear weapons and proceeded to reach out to both the US and Israel, trying to create a Washington-Tel Aviv-New Delhi entente against Communism and Islam – the two problem ideologies as posed by US political scientist Samuel Huntington's style of fundamentalist geopolitics. When Defense Minister Jaswant Singh visited Israel in July 2000 he said that the relationship between the two countries was strained due to “domestic politics because of a Muslim vote bank.”[\[xx\]](#) The anti-Muslim tenor of this statement played to the Sharonist galleries and offers us a window of why the forces of Hindutva are so eager to make an anti-Islam alliance with those of Sharonism. Over the past three years, the relationship has flourished with high level delegations making trips to each country, and with trade in harmless and harmful (namely, arms) goods on the increase with each year. Until the invasion put them in doubt, the two governments had planned a large celebration for the tenth anniversary of normal diplomatic relations, with presidential visits and with stamps released in both countries to commemorate the friendship. In addition, the right-wing Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had planned to release his newest book of poems in Hebrew. Even as the Arab-Israeli troubles continues and as the Israeli-right emboldens itself in its war against the PA, the BJP-led rightist government crafts a special relationship with Israel.

Before the 1967 War, the Hindutva Right did not hold any special brief for that west Asian country. In fact, the leaders of the Hindutva Right held Hitler in reverence, an ideological affinity that circumvented any turn toward Israel. Savarkar was feted by the Nazi press in the 1940s for his enthusiasm at the Blitzkrieg. His heir, Golwalkar, reflected on the Holocaust and concluded: “Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and Cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.” Indeed, this philosophy remains at the heart of Hindutva.

A reassessment of Israel came in the aftermath of the 1967. The Hindutva

forces were disappointed that India's defeat of Pakistan in the war of 1971 was not followed by a similar humiliation of the enemy. Israel slowly became the model, not only for its military brashness, but also for the possibility of a Hindutva-Sharonist alliance against Islam. When the first al-Fatah delegation made an official visit to India in the early 1970s, the Hindu Right political party was the only one to conduct protests against its presence.

Hindutva's alliance with the rightist tendencies in Israel is not so strange after all, because at the ideological level Hindutva is much like Sharonism, for both extol the importance of the Race-State, and both cast aspersions at the presence of a Muslim minority. If the activists of Hindutva yell "Jao Kabristan ya Pakistan" to Indian Muslims, those of Sharonism follow Golda Meir in the belief that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian." An Indian-born analyst at the Zionist Freeman Center in Houston (Texas) makes just this connection: "Islamic fascists see Bharat [India] as a soft spot to propagate their irrational creed and foment violence. India tries to placate them. Israel expels them. This is what Bharat should do. If they hate Hindu Rashtra so much they are free to leave for dar-ul Islam." India must learn from Israel, to act against Pakistan, for instance, in much the same way as the IDF acts against the PA.

The visits of official delegations from the two countries indicate their mutual interests. When the Israelis travel to India, in train come a number of arms manufacturers and military personnel. So during the 21 November 2001 Israeli visit to the Indian Defense Ministry in New Delhi, the team included the head of weapons development and infrastructure in the Israeli Defense Ministry, Mapat (Major General Dr. Yitzhak Ben-Israel), the head of the department for security exports, Sibat (Major General Yossi Ben-Hanan), the deputy director of foreign affairs (Brigadier General Yekutiel Mor).^[xxi] When India's Home Minister L. K. Advani made his high-level visit to Israel he took with him the home secretary (Kamal Pandey), the director of the Central Bureau of Investigations (S. K. Raghavan) and the director of the Intelligence Bureau (Shyamal Dutta). Israel is eager to sell arms to India, while India is eager to learn anti-terrorism measures from the Israeli Shin Bet.^[xxii] These are the practical components of the Indo-Israeli alliance of our period.

The Hindutva Right is not the only ones in India to have ties with the Israeli government. The Indian armed forces and intelligence agencies have a long association with their counterparts in Israel. During the Indo-China War of 1962 and the two conflicts with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, Israel provided small arms and ammunition for Indian troops (a provision not well-known at the time). In January 1963, a few months after India's border war with China, the Indian government reached out to the Israeli military establishment and opened a dialogue. Two years later, Israeli cabinet minister Yigal Alon visited India. But the deals in the years before 1992 took place very secretly, harbored for the most part behind the doors of the intelligence wings of both countries. RAW and Mossad began relations in the late 1960s and it was this association that enabled Dayan to visit India in the 1970s. The Israeli army and intelligence is well known for its secrecy and RAW followed in those well-trod footprints: information about Israeli-Indian contacts is not easy to find, but for the occasional statement by politicians or bureaucrats.^[xxiii]

Since 1992, the relationship remained clandestine, with both sides wary of

any open acknowledgement of the military ties. In March 1992, when Deputy Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to New Delhi to open the embassy, he told the press that “nobody told us of Indian needs in the areas of defense.” Not two months later Israeli defense industrialists came on an official visit to India to discuss arms purchases, but neither government went public to acknowledge the tour. Israel’s charge d’affaires Giora Becher noted that “it was not right time” to talk about the arms trade, and when challenged in Parliament, the Congress leader and Prime Minister noted that “we obviously know less than some of the members [of the opposition].”

Emboldened by the rise of the Hindu Right in India and the Sharonist Right in Israel, the militaries and arms manufacturers in both countries became more open about their relationship. The Confederation of Indian Industry, the Israeli Manufacturers Association, the Israeli Aircraft Industries exchanged delegations, and at the December 1993 Indian air show at Bangalore, the Sibat (the Foreign Defense Assistance and Defense Export Organization of the Israeli army) held the largest demonstration after the Russians. With the Russians unable to retrofit the old Soviet armaments, the Indians turned to Israeli expertise in this area.

India’s first shopping list was loaded with aircraft demands, mainly to replace the ailing MIG-21 and MIG-29 fleet. But by the time the Hindu Right took power in 1998, the list grew much longer and far more complex. It also reveals the sub-imperial ambitions of the Hindu Right over southern Asia. In May 1998, a few days after the nuclear tests, a delegation from Israeli Aircraft Industries toured India to sell their pilotless aircraft anti-ship missiles. Components of a missile defense shield, then, have been in the works for India for at least three years. A set of deals have been signed between the arms merchants in India and Israel to buy goods for the airforce (MIGs, Light Combat Aircraft, AWACs), navy (aircraft carrier, maritime radar, attack craft), army (Main Battle Tank, Advanced Light Helicopters), and for the missile branch of the military (the Indian defense contractors want to buy Israeli guidance and launch systems for the Prithvi surface to surface missile, and for the sea to surface Sagarika system, but there is also evidence that India wants Israeli help with the Akash, a missile system akin to the M-11). These weapons would put India into contention as the main power not only in South Asia, but perhaps, as the second front against the Chinese (a move that enabled the US to revise its military doctrine to fight only one full-scale war; its proxy powers would take care of the other one, in the new scenario). Furthermore, the missile defense parts of the deals would enable India to fantastically suggest that Pakistan’s nuclear option had been neutralized, and that the parity of 1998 had been negated. India’s eagerness for the missile defense, then, is part of the desire of the Hindu Right to will away the 1998 Pakistani tests on the Chagai range.

If Israel’s defense industry sold India only a few million dollars worth of armaments in 1992, by the end of 2001, the amount increased to an astronomical \$800 million per year, with contracts for several billion dollars worth of goods. As India and Pakistan sat down for talks in Agra (India) in mid-July 2001, the Indian and Israeli defense chiefs met in Lod (Israel) to conclude a \$2 billion deal that will upgrade Indian fighter jets, provide India

with Barak-type surface to surface missiles, and with parts of a missile defense package (unmanned aerial vehicles and radar systems).[\[xxiv\]](#) The radar system, known as Green Pine, is part of the Arrow anti-ballistic missile system deployed in Israel and it alone comes at a cost of \$250 million. The unmanned aerial devices cost \$300 million and some of them from an earlier purchase have already been deployed by the Indian military (they saw action during the 1999 Kargil engagement) The IAI indicated last year that a further \$2 billion in arms sales would follow the July 2001 contract; in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, the US virtually ended the sanctions regime on India and thereby has increased the chances of a further arms build-up in India due to the IAI's supply channels. Only the US buys more arms from Israel than India at this time. Israel is now India's second largest arms supplier after Russia.

Conventional weapons are not the only interest. Twice before the 1998 nuclear tests by India in Pokhran, India's leading nuclear scientist Dr. Abdul Kalam visited Israel. After his June 1996 visit, the two countries began to cooperate earnestly on sales of missile technology to India. When Israeli defense personnel and defense industrialists visit India, it is well known that they make a stop to see Dr. Abdul Kalam whose title was Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Defense, but who is known for his crucial role in nuclear weapons development. Both governments deny any cooperation on the nuclear front, but the materials available seem to suggest that some element of discussion and assistance might have been involved.[\[xxv\]](#)

Just a few days after India announced the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel, Ya'acov Lapidot, the Director General of the Israeli Police Ministry after a visit to India told the press that Israel was ready to give India help in the field of law and order, notably in the suppression of terrorism. Benjamin Netanyahu, then a junior minister in the government, told the Indian press that Israel "had developed expertise in dealing with terrorism at the field level and also internationally at the political and legal level, and would be happy to share it with India." In late February of 1992, India's Defense Minister Sharad Pawar said that the new relations allowed India to draw "Israel's successful experience to curb terrorism."[\[xxvi\]](#)

When the BJP-led government came to power in 1998, the issue of terrorism took on a new urgency, since this government was prone to depict any act of violence by a Muslim as terrorism, and consequently any act of violence by a Hindu as either self-defense or the resentment of years of tyranny. In 1994, Advani visited Israel as leader of the opposition and has since developed warm ties with the Sharonist elements in the Israeli establishment. When Advani returned in 1995 he met Netanyahu, who presented him with a book on terrorism. Since then Advani has made it a practice to quote from that book when he speaks about terrorism, particularly the following: "Terrorism is a deliberate and systematic murder of fundamental rights of the civilians and of terrorizing them for a political gain. Free society must reject absolutely the notion that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.'" In other words, even as this is a rather opaque quote, the PLO (for Israel) and the various Kashmiri militant groups (for India) are terrorists regardless of any political claims they may have.

During his visit in 2000, Advani, now as Home Minister, said that he wanted to learn how Israel has dealt with Islamic fundamentalism. "Israel's Mossad has proved itself to be an expert in this field," he said and he hoped that the Indian agencies would learn "some of the finer aspects of intelligence gathering from the Israelis," notably from Mossad and Shin Bet. "Israel and India have both grappled with [terrorism] during the last two decades," he noted. "Terrorist organizations are now known to establish and have international linkages. This makes it necessary for the countries which are victims of such terrorism to learn from the experience of each other." [xxvii] Rumors of Israeli agents alongside Indian troops in Kashmir frequently make their way among the press corps in New Delhi and in Tel Aviv, but there is nothing substantive to make a story. But it is certainly the case that Israel offered support during the Kargil campaign in 1999, it has advised India on techniques to close the Line of Control (similar to Israel's attempts to close the border with the PA), and in early January 2002, Israel Defense Minister Shimon Peres told the Mumbai press that Israel is ready to help India deal with Pakistan after the 13 December 2001 attack on parliament, but "it depends on India, what it wants and we are available." [xxviii]

India and Israel could not be major players in the US-UK's Fifth Afghan War, because, as the Pakistanis made clear, the coalition must have an Islamic face. Nevertheless, the aftermath of 9/11 and of the war reveals certain trends toward the creation of a Tel Aviv-New Delhi-Washington axis that will have an important role in the southern and western parts of Asia. In January 2002, the US cleared the sale of the Israeli Phalcon early warning radar systems to India (a deal worth \$1 billion); the US had earlier stopped the deal with the argument that it might escalate tensions in the subcontinent. Now with tensions at war point, the US allows the sale. Meanwhile, the Chinese sold two squadrons (46) of F-7 MG fighter jets to Pakistan, a sale that enables the Pakistani Air Force to reach aerial parity with India. India wants to emulate the Israeli path to being a regional power with international prestige, at whatever the social or human cost. Israel sees India as a vast market for its arms, and as an ally against what it calls the Islamic world. The US, under the right, is eager to see a new configuration that includes India and Israel to encircle both Islam and Communism, to dispatch the new bogeymen of the 21st Century. Meanwhile, the IDF tanks and helicopters ruthlessly besiege the Palestinians. These are dark times.

[i] The narrative that follows below is drawn from several issues of the Jerusalem-based monthly magazine, *Between the Lines*, from the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, and from the *New York Times*.

[ii] Since 1967, the US government has tendered almost \$100 billion in military assistance to Israel. When it was clear that the IDF used US-made Apache helicopters for their targeted killings, the US government noted, "US weapons sales do not carry a stipulation that the weapon can't be used against civilians. We cannot second guess an Israeli commander who calls in helicopter gunships" (4 October 2000).

[iii] Ben Halpern, *The Idea of the Jewish State*, Cambridge: Harvard University

Press, 1954.

[iv] There are now several rich histories of pre-Israel Palestine, such as Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine. Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

[v] Aharon Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World*, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970, p. 248 (1925) and p. 291 (1931) and Benny Morris, "Falsifying the Record: A Fresh Look at Zionist Documentation of 1948," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1995, p. 56 (1948).

[vi] There is an excellent account in David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, London: Faber and Faber, 1977, pp. 126-127.

[vii] Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, Afterword.

[viii] "Return of the Terrorist: the Crimes of Ariel Sharon," *Counterpunch*, 7 February 2001.

[ix] Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World*, p. 538 (Dayan during the war) and Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, pp. 220-221 (Dayan after the war).

[x] Mouin Rabbani, "A Smorgasbord of Failure: Oslo and the Al-Aqsa Intifada," *The New Intifada. Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, Ed. Roxane Carey, London: Verso Books, 2001, pp. 76-77.

[xi] Edward Said, "Palestinians Under Siege," *The New Intifada*, p. 28.

[xii] Sara Roy, "Decline and Disfigurement: The Palestinian Economy After Oslo," *The New Intifada*, p. 100.

[xiii] Roy, "Decline and Disfigurement," p. 92

[xiv] Roy, "Decline and Disfigurement," p. 102.

[xv] Roy, "Decline and Disfigurement," p. 103.

[xvi] Irving Kristol, "Who Needs a Peace in the Middle East?" *Wall Street Journal*, 21 June 1989.

[xvii] Although this is not as strong as it used to be. Murray Friedman, "Are American Jews Moving to the Right?" *Commentary*, April 2000.

[xviii] I tell this story in *Fat Cats and Running Dogs: The Enron Stage of Capitalism* (2002).

[xix] I tell this story in *War Against the Planet: The Fifth Afghan War, US Imperialism and Other Assorted Fundamentalisms*, New Delhi: LeftWord, 2002.

[xx] John Cherian, "Sharon's War," *Frontline*, 22 December 2001.

[xxi] Arie O'Sullivan, "New Deals sealed with New Delhi," *Jerusalem Post*, 23 November 2001.

[xxii] "India Works with Israeli Intelligence," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 June 2000.

[xxiii] Manoj Joshi, "Changing Equations: The Coming Together of India and Israel," *Frontline*, 4 June 1993.

[[xxiv](#)] "Israel, India Sign Agreement on Defense Industry Cooperation," *Xinhua News Service*, 17 July 2001.

[[xxv](#)] Dominic Coldwell, "Still in the Closet, Barely," *Al-Ahram*, 30 September 1999, Yossi Melman, "India's visiting strongman wants to expand nuclear cooperation with Israel," *Ha'aretz*, 16 June 2000 and Richard Norton-Taylor, "MPs question 'nuclear upgrade' of Israel's Jaguar bombers," *The Guardian*, 24 April 2002.

[[xxvi](#)] All this is from P. R. Kumaraswamy's crucial study, *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership*, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, no. 40, September 1998.

[[xxvii](#)] Chandan Nandy, "Advani Focus on Israel Terror Tips," *The Telegraph*, 31 May 2000.

[[xxviii](#)] "Israel Ready to Help If Asked," *The Hindu*, 10 January 2002.