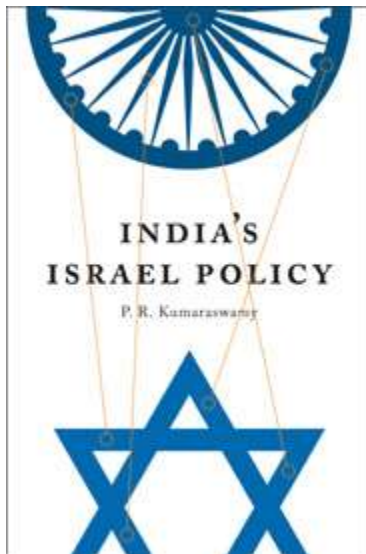


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India's Israel Policy,

P.R. Kumaraswamy.

New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 362 pages.

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his is the first comprehensive study and analysis of the views of major Indian political figures and the policies of the Indian National Congress and later the government of India toward the TYishuv in Palestine and later the state of Israel up to the present. Kumaraswamy describes India's public attitude toward Israel until the end of the Cold War as 'cool, unfriendly and even hostile' despite the fact that there has never been anti-Semitism in India since Jews first arrived there following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (pp. 1–2). Indeed, India was the 'last major non-Islamic country' to establish diplomatic relations with Israel (p. 268) - shortly after the People's Republic of China- in January 1992 and justification given by many political figures and parties for not doing so sooner is derived from a statement written by Mohandas Gandhi in his *Harijan* weekly newspaper in November 1938: 'Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English and France to the French' (p. 25).

Yet the Mahatma made many other pronouncements that have never been quoted to justify foreign policy positions and even told American journalist Louis Fischer in 1946, perhaps

affected by the events of the Holocaust, that the 'Jews have a good case in Palestine. If the Arabs have a claim to Palestine, the Jews have a prior claim' (p. 38). The Indian National Congress (INC)- and its chief spokesman for foreign affairs, Jawaharlal Nehru- were just as mindful as Gandhi of the importance of Palestine to the rival Muslim League, which flirted with and later embraced the idea of a separate entity for Muslims of India. While Nehru had a better understanding of the historic plight of the Jews than did Gandhi, he was unsympathetic to nationalism based on religion and like others in the INC viewed the Palestine issue from a secular and anti-imperialist perspective: Palestine was an Arab country and while the rights of Jews living there should be protected, it should not be through cooperation with British imperial interests or at the expense of Arab rights. In 1947, India as a member of the 11-country United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) proposed a federal plan for Palestine known as the minority report, rejected by both Arabs and Jews, which had the support of representatives from Iran and Yugoslavia; ironically, India's representative Abdur Rahman emigrated to Pakistan shortly after.

India recognized Israel in September 1950- many months after Yugoslavia and Iran had done so- even though Israel had been a member of the United Nations since May 1949. However, while Israel established a trade commission office in Mumbai shortly after India's recognition that became a consulate in 1953, official jurisdiction of Israeli representatives posted there was restricted to the Indian state of Maharashtra (and after 1989 to Kerala); they could meet Indian government officials elsewhere in India only as foreign nationals, but these contacts were very limited. Meanwhile, Maulana Azad, officially Minister of Education until his death in 1958, served as Nehru's advisor on Arab and Islamic affairs. Kumaraswamy contends that Azad prevented normalization of relations with Israel as it would harm India's position *vis-à-vis* the Arabs regarding Kashmir and would 'antagonize domestic Muslim opinion' (p. 146). From 1953 onward, Nehru developed a close relationship with Egyptian leader Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser as both became important figures in what evolved into the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. The Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian states in April 1955 excluded Israel due to Pakistani opposition and the threat of an Arab boycott, a decision with which India was uncomfortable. However, with Israel's collaborative involvement with the British and French in the Suez War of 1956, Nehru condemned the military action against Egypt and formally ruled out normalization of relations with Israel; in 1962, Egypt remained neutral during the Sino-Indian War, while India secretly received military assistance from Israel (as was the case during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965). Nehru died in 1964 before the Cairo NAM summit, which adopted more strident positions against Israel and in favour of the Palestinians.

Indira Gandhi's government condemned Israel even before the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and its posture was more hostile after five Indian peacekeepers in the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) were killed in the crossfire in Gaza. India supported Egypt in the 1973 war and established full diplomatic relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization in March 1980. While Rajiv Gandhi openly met with Israeli officials during the 1980s, the first Palestinian Intifada and Israeli involvement in Sri Lanka against the Tamil insurgents and acceptance of the Fiji coup in 1987 precluded normalization of relations. Only with the end of the Cold War and the weakening of the NAM were conditions favourable to do so. India still gave support to the Palestinians, but was able to separate bilateral relations with Israel from differences it held with the Jewish state over the course of and setbacks to the Middle East peace process. Cooperation in

economic activities and defence matters has benefitted both India and Israel over the last two decades.

Kumaraswamy's book is a well researched and thorough account of Indo-Israeli relations that is highly recommended for both academics and the general public. It is more expansive in outlook than Prithvi Ram Mudiam's *India and the Middle East*,¹ which devotes one chapter each to Indo-Israeli and Indo-PLO relations, and can be read together with Jacob Abadi's *Israel's Quest for Recognition and Acceptance in Asia*², which includes one chapter each on Israeli-Indian and Israeli-Pakistani relations.

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¹ Prithvi Ram Mudiam, *India and the Middle East* (London: British Academic Press, 1994).

² Jacob Abadi, *Israel's Quest for Recognition and Acceptance in Asia: Garrison State Diplomacy* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).