

ISRAEL'S ARMS EXPORTS AND THE US FACTOR: CASE  
STUDIES OF CHINA AND SOUTH AFRICA, 1967-2000

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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**DECLARATION**

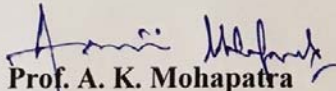
I declare that the thesis entitled **Israel's Arms Exports and the US Factor: Case Studies of China and South Africa, 1967-2000** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.



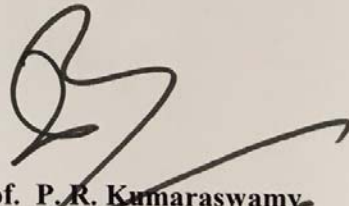
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We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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*It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge. — Albert Einstein*

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# Abbreviations

AAM	Air-to-Air Missiles
AECA	Arms Export Control Act
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
ANC	African National Congress
ARMSCOR	Armaments Corporation
ATBM	Anti-tactical ballistic missile
ATE	Automatic Test Equipment
ATGMs	Anti-tank guided missiles
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control Systems
BOSS	Bureau for State Security
CAAA	Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCS	Cabinet Committee on Security
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CITS	China International Travel Service
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DMI	Department of Military Intelligence
DoD	Department of Defence
DONS	Department of National Security
DRDO	Defence Research and Development Organisation
DTE	Data Transfer Equipment
EWS	Electronic Warfare Systems
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GAO	General Accounting Office
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEAT	High Energy Anti-tank

IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IAI	Israel Aircraft Industries
IDF	Israel Defence Forces
IMI	Israel Military Industries
IRBM	Intermediate range ballistic missiles
ISL	Israel Shipyards Limited
ITAR	International Traffics in Arms Regulations
LoC	Line of Control
MBTs	Main battle tanks
MDA	Missile Defence Agency
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MRSAM	Medium-range Surface-to-Air Missiles
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NLOS	No Line of Sight
NP	National Party
NPT	Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ONI	Office of the Naval Intelligence
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
PM	Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	Research and Development

RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
ROC	Republic of China
RPV	Remotely piloted vehicle
SAAF	South African Air Force
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SRBM	Short-range ballistic missiles
SSDC	Space and Strategic Defence Command
SSMs	Surface-to-surface missiles
STOL	Short Take Off and Landing
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TELs	Transporter-erector Launchers
TMD	Theatre missile defence capabilities
UAR	United Arab Republic
UAVs	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
USAF	United States Air Force
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WDNS	Weapon Delivery and Navigation Systems

# Chapter One

## Introduction

Isolation and security are the twin major challenges for Israel since its establishment on 14 May 1948. For the last six and half decades, it continues to face problems on these fronts but in different dimensions. Despite establishing robust defence industries and forging relations with different countries beyond the region, there is always an element of uncertainty in political and security fronts. Although the security threats from the hostile Arab countries have begun to dissipate since the mid-1990s, the rising influence of extremist groups in its immediate neighbours, including Lebanon and Syria, are posing serious concerns to the Israeli security establishments. As it has been the case since the early 1970s, it will continue to need the support of its major ally, the United States (US) for security as well as for political backing.

Historically, before the State of Israel was created, ensuring security of the Jews and forming an alliance with any of the ‘Great Powers’ became the fundamental objectives of the Zionist movement. Theodor Herzl, whose main vision was to establish a Jewish state, “assumed that the Zionist movement would achieve its goal not through an understanding with the local Palestinians but through an alliance with the dominant Great Power of the day” (Shlaim 2004: 658). Herzl made unrelenting efforts to gain an external support. During the pre-statehood days, the *yishuv* (Jewish residents of Mandate Palestine) were weak in terms of military capabilities while the Arabs equipped themselves with arms procured from Europe. Under such circumstances, one of the primary strategies of the Zionist movement was to receive military-security assistance from an external power. Due to the non-availability of reliable arms source, the Jews, however, began to manufacture rudimentary items such as small arms. This problem continued to exist for a prolonged period. Thus, this was one of the most important reasons why the Jewish leaders, both before and after the establishment of Israel, gave immense importance to establishing a self-reliant defence industry, capable of manufacturing a wide variety of weapon systems.

After the statehood, Israel did not have any reliable arms supplier although both the Cold War superpowers—the US and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)—voted in favour of the Partition Plan adopted by the United Nations (UN) on 29 November 1947. Despite their ideological differences, this was a rare instance where these rival blocs agreed on a common issue. On the other hand, the Partition Plan was vehemently opposed by the Arab states and they decided to wage war and isolate Israel regionally and internationally. As expressed by Bernard Reich, “...the Arab League declaration of war against the new state upon its declaration of independence, were seen as additional evidence of this Arab design to prevent the creation of Israel and later, to ensure its demise” (Reich 2004: 121). Since then, the Arab countries intensified their campaigns to boycott Israel politically and economically, and most continue to do so.

The 1948 War that was started immediately by the Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, following the announcement of the independence, increased Israel’s threat perceptions and insecurity in its own region. This, at the same time, became paradoxical that distant foreign countries began to recognise its establishment while the immediate neighbours called for its destruction. During this war, Israel seriously felt the difficulties in importing arms although it could purchase a few military items from Czechoslovakia. This arrangement could be made due to its relations with the Soviet Union at the time. The manner in which the war ended, that is, by signing armistice agreements with the Arab adversaries in the first half of 1949 did not increase Israel’s security but enhanced uncertainties about the intentions of the Arab countries. The period after the armistice agreement—the 1950s—was followed by tensions, with rising frequency of shootouts, cross-border attacks and other violent activities. While the Arab forces were armed with Soviet-supplied weapons systems, Israel did not have a reliable source to provide them with arms and ammunitions. Therefore, even after 1948, the security situation of the Jews was almost similar to that of pre-statehood period. Vulnerabilities increased in the absence of an ally which could support it militarily and to guarantee security against the hostile Arab states.

The initial difficulty in obtaining weapons from the Western countries was mainly due to its policy of “non-identification”. It refrained from siding with either of the Cold War blocs and this was adopted primarily with the intention of securing economic,

political and military assistance from the US and Soviet Union. Israel, moreover, did not intend to get embroiled in the rising Cold War antagonism. The Jewish factor played an important role for taking up such a calculative and neutral position. The presence of a sizeable Jewish population in both the blocs, welfare of the Jews everywhere in the world, need for *aliyah* (Jewish immigration), requirement for arms and economic assistance from external sources made Israel promote this policy, especially in forging foreign relations. Although these two superpowers granted political support during the process of the state formation, the US did not agree to supply weapons systems to Israel unlike the East bloc (even if it was for a short duration). The US wanted to resist the penetration of the Soviet Union into the region, and hence, it decided not to antagonise the Arabs by supplying arms to Israel. The Arab states, with their vast oil resources were considered to be a strategic asset.

The situation was further complicated by the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950 as Israel was deprived of source for arms. This was viewed by a scholar as “an attempt by the Western powers [US, Britain and France] to establish a monopoly over the supply of arms to the Middle East and to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining a toehold in the region” (Shlaim 2004: 660). This arms control mechanism, however, became unfavourable to Israel as the signatories of this declaration supplied weapons to its opponents in the region. The interests of both superpowers to lure the Arab countries to their respective camps, in accordance to their Cold War strategic calculations, refrained from supplying arms to Israel. This further reinforced the sense of vulnerability of having situated in an unfriendly environment. The policy of neutrality which was adopted with an interest to enlarge external support did not bring a desirable outcome for Israel. Simultaneously, the US increasingly began to see Israeli-Soviet Union relations with suspicion.

Despite his pro-West orientation, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion tried to avoid an outright identification with the Western countries, particularly the US. This approach, however, did not last long due to an external development. In what could be considered as the first event that altered the “non-identification” policy, the Korean War in June 1950 made Israel side with the US by voting for the UN resolution that condemned the North Korean aggression. This became the earliest instance when Israel succumbed to the US pressure. The shift in the Israeli foreign policy, as

observed by Michael Brecher, was “catalyzed by the need for arms and economic aid, rationalised by the perception of renewed Soviet hostility, as eased by the indifference of the Third World” (Brecher 1972: 561). The US, however, did not change its arms sales policy not only for the region but also for Israel. The estrangement between Israel and the Soviet Union increased after the Korean crisis and the former’s alignment with the US became more noticeable.

Israel’s support during the Korean crisis did not lead to the formation of a strategic cooperation with the US. The belief that it would receive security assistance from the latter dissipated as the Eisenhower administration continuously declined Israel’s request for arms. There was no signal from the administration indicating its willingness to become a security provider for Israel and this became a major setback for the latter which continuously looked for a partnership with a major ally. It was at this crucial stage Britain emerged as the first Western country which expressed an interest to cooperate with Israel in defence-related matters. This began in February 1951 when Commander-in-Chief of the British land forces General Sir Brian Robertson visited Israel during his tour of West Asia. The visit was considered as an initiative of Britain to prepare a defence plan exclusively for the region where Israel would also be included. This, however, did not materialise as Ben-Gurion rejected the idea of building a British base in Gaza and also similar bases inside Israel. Despite this rejection, the Israeli leader mentioned to the British officials his interests to be a part of defence plans and how to enhance his country’s industrial capacities so that it could contribute to such initiatives pertaining to the region. Much to the chagrin of Israel, it was not asked to join the Middle East Command, a plan put forward by the US and Britain and instead, invited Egypt to be a founding member. Notwithstanding this setback, a not-so-significant arms trade had started between Britain and Israel which lasted for about four years.

Between 1952 and 1956, Britain exported arms to West Asia, unlike the US which remained adamant against arms sales. Israel’s attempts to seek major arms from Britain during this period met with insignificant success, and by the time the Suez Crisis started in October 1956, it could purchase only 24 Meteor jets, old Sherman tanks and World War II vintage destroyers (Levey 1995b: 772). Having no better option or alternative left, Israel had to purchase these jets which were obsolete. On the



contrary, Britain already supplied Egypt with advanced Centurion tanks before the Suez crisis began, while it refused to export the same platform to Israel. As observed by Zach Levey,

Israel's relations with Britain was delicate because Jerusalem's arms procurement efforts in London had to be balanced with Israeli policies which were often diametrically opposed to Britain's interests in the Middle East; defence of the British position on the Suez Canal and preservation of influence in Jordan and Iraq (Ibid: 773).

There was a great degree of ambivalence in the British policy during this period due to which Israel remained concerned about former's close ties with Arab states. Further, the quantity of arms supply was modest and Israel suspected the reticent behaviour of Britain.

In continuation to exclusion from regional groupings, Israel's inclusion in Baghdad Pact and the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, both occurred in 1955, was denied. This happened at a time when the Arab states were rapidly moving closer to the Soviet Union and began to receive a huge quantity of arms. After Britain's exit as defence partner, France emerged as the main suppliers of military items to Israel between 1956 and 1967. It was during this cooperation that Israel could even construct a nuclear facility (Perlmutter 1969: 75, Steinbach 2002: 331). The vulnerability of depending overtly on an external source for arms was exposed again when French President Charles de Gaulle imposed arms embargo on the day the June 1967 War broke out. The embargo became a bitter lesson for Israel as it impacted adversely on its aircraft procurement programmes in times of crisis. This emboldened the defence indigenisation programmes in various types of weapons, including major platforms such as tanks and aircrafts.

Of all the wars Israel fought with the Arab countries, the victory in the June War came along with serious political and security implications. As more territories were captured, it became imperative for Israel to reorient its security policy and the main emphasis was on having defensible borders. Following the war, the Arab countries enhanced its anti-Israel campaigns not only in the region but also in the Third World countries, including Sub-Saharan Africa with which Israel had robust economic and military cooperation. The Soviet Union, too, increased its footprints in Egypt by supplying newly-developed and sophisticated military equipments. In order to contain

further Soviet penetration, the US began to reconsider its policy and agreed to supply more advanced arms, although it already sold Hawk missiles to Israel in 1962. It should be noted that it was with these regional strategic interests at the backdrop that the US began to change its stance from mid-1960s, though relations burgeoned noticeably only from the early 1970s.

As new political and security challenges emerged, forging closer ties with the US became one of the most important Israeli foreign policy objectives. Political isolation grew wider and cordial relations with the Sub-Saharan countries began to deteriorate after the June War as the affluent and oil-rich Arab states lured them with large economic incentives. The mass severing of diplomatic ties by these African nations following the October 1973 War and oil crisis became a turning point for Israel. Since then, the US has become Israel's largest aid provider and military supplier. At the same time, in the mid-1970s, condemnation from the Third World countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia at the international forum such as the UN grew. Similar to the criticisms against South Africa's *apartheid* regime, Zionism was equated with racism and several countries voted for the resolution at the UN General Assembly in November 1975 condemning both the countries. Unlike the Arab countries, Israel neither had political leverage nor natural resources to gain support of those countries which snapped diplomatic ties with it. As a result of this development, it started looking for alternative means to forge foreign. While it sold arms in the mid-1950s and early 1960s mainly for economic incentives, the same export began to be used as a foreign policy instrument.

Meanwhile, the emerging politico-security challenges from mid-1970s led to Israel's dependence on the US for military hardware as well as technology for its indigenisation programmes. After the October War and Lebanon War of 1982, Israel began to give considerable attention towards transforming military-security policies.

Writing on this issue, some observed:

The Israeli revolution in security affairs will alleviate, albeit slowly, the three-way tension between manpower, military requirements and society. A new model IDF [Israeli Defence Forces], with a large professional component, will adapt to demographic and cultural changes in Israeli society that will have made the old militia system untenable. The new-model IDF will look rather more like the US armed-high technology, with combat arms, perhaps developing an

ethos that will place it at some remove from Israeli society (Cohen *et al.* 1998: 63).

These internal security concerns could be attributed to the strengthening of relations between the two countries.

Between 1970s and 1990s, the US provided about US\$71 billion in aid and 90 percent was on security assistance (Clarke 1997:200-204). A number of Israeli military inventories such as Lavi fighter aircraft and Arrow anti-missile system benefited from US financial assistance and technology transfers. The burgeoning of bilateral relations gave Israel access to the American-origin technology but this started to give enormous leverage to the US on the former's arms export and foreign policies at later stages. Most of the military ties which Israel forged from late 1970s had the blessing of the US, either directly or tacitly. Depending on the strategic interests, the latter promoted Israel's military cooperation with a few countries during the height of the Cold War, and this was visible in the cases studies for this research, namely China and South Africa. Forging relations and strengthening them became a major foreign policy priority for Israel, especially considering South Africa's abundant strategic raw materials, and China being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) since October 1971. In both these cases, Israel's arms exports, including related military assistance, became the salient features of their bilateral ties.

The emergence of South Africa as a defence trade partner was timely for Israel as it lost Iran (Steinberg 1993), which used to be its strategic and lucrative market before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. That said the framework for the military cooperation was created by the June War when the Sub-Saharan Africa countries began to disengage themselves from Israel under pressure from the oil-rich Arab countries. Despite South Africa's recognition of Israel in May 1949, it took nearly three decades for Pretoria to open its consulate in Tel Aviv due to its relations with the Arabs countries. Although there were high-level visits during the 1950s between Israeli and South African officials, the relations were not strong. This was mainly due to the former's close cooperation with the Sub-Saharan countries and its criticism of the *apartheid* system. However, certain similarities between Israel and South Africa in the mid-1960s brought a change how each one viewed the other. Around this period, anti-white militancy was on the rise in the neighbouring countries of Rhodesia and

Angola, and Israel also faced similar threats from the hostile Arabs which resulted into the June War. A deep-rooted sense of isolation was felt by Israel and South Africa, and this commonality brought them closer.

Although as a humble beginning, the origin of the Israeli-South African military relations could be traced back to late 1960s, around the time when France imposed arms embargo following the June War. South Africa came to Israel's rescue by supplying crucial spare parts for the French-made Mirage jets and this resulted in the formation of Israel-South Africa Friendship League in 1968. There was a convergence of interests as Israel explored its defence markets and sources for strategic raw materials while South Africa searched for supplier of military hardware and technologies. The defence indigenisation programmes undertaken by them strengthened their ties in military-security affairs. A significant breakthrough happened following the October War and the subsequent oil crisis. This increased Israel's estrangement from the continent. Thus, political isolation and growing security concerns brought them closer and military relations began to flourish, leading to greater political contacts and interactions.

Both sides began to cooperate in areas such as arms sales, cooperation in the development and financing of weapons systems, training in counter-insurgency techniques and sharing of intelligence information. Supply of military hardware was only one aspect of the military ties and equally important was the South African purchase of Israeli technology and electronics with military-related applications. Military cooperation was also well-extended in the naval warfare and air force, where both conducted joint exercises. Relevant weapon systems for all three forces—army, navy and air force—were imported from Israel during the heyday of the ties. Another dimension that became controversial was the alleged cooperation in the nuclear field. Prior to South Africa's entry, it was France which supplied Israel with uranium. This supply lessened when de Gaulle was elected as president in January 1959. Since then, Israel's demand for a larger quantity of uranium was apparently sufficed by South Africa and this took their relations to new levels, including cooperation in missile development programmes.

Such an alleged cooperation enticed attention from the international community, particularly the US. From the late 1970s, a constant monitoring was put in place over the suspicious nuclear-related activities. The speciality of this relationship was that Israel continued to export arms, upgrade weapons systems and transfer military technologies despite the UN-imposed arms embargo that came into force in November 1977 against the *apartheid* regime. Israel even tried to evade pressures from the US, which ensued from mid-1980s, but ultimately succumbed as the latter threatened to terminate annual military provided to those countries which supplied arms and all forms of military assistance to South Africa. It was visible that the Israeli-South African ties remained strong during the *apartheid* regime but plunged to a significant low once the democratically elected government came to power in 1994. The wider network of military relations were partly due to Israel's political isolation in the West Asian region and its desire to forge close and stable relations with other countries through a strong and robust military relations.

Similar pattern was visible in Israel's approach towards China. Its recognition of People's Republic of China in January 1950 was not followed by formal diplomatic relations and a number of its efforts were rebuffed by China. Attempts were made in the mid-1950s but did not succeed. It was often through economic channel that both of them tried to establish diplomatic relations but international events, particularly the 1950 Korean Crisis and 1955 Bandung Conference had adverse effects on the endeavours. Due to this, the Sino-Israeli relations between mid-1950s and mid-1970s remained frosty. During this period, China began to engage with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Egypt. Its support for the Palestinian cause further diminished the prospects for formalisation of ties with Israel. Following the October War, in general, Israel sought to break its isolation through arms diplomacy. This was also the time when China was witnessing far-reaching domestic political changes with the demise of Mao Zedong and emergence of Deng Xiaoping and his drive for military modernisation (Chow 2004: 128).

China's increasing attention towards the international affairs from the later part of the 1970s brought a change in its policy towards Israel. In conjunction with its opening of the economy to the outside world, China searched for sources to import military items and technologies. This happened as its military supplies were affected due to the rifts

with the Soviet Union in early 1970s. As most of the earliest efforts to normalise relations took place outside their territories, it was in Paris in 1975 when, for the first time, the Chinese military officials were impressed by Israel's display of the newly-designed and developed Kfir fighter jet in an exhibition. This particular event led to the establishment of military contacts between the two countries. When all the previous economic and political tools failed to bring a mutual understanding, it was Israel's readiness to meet some of the immediate Chinese military demands that paved the way for the eventual diplomatic breakthrough. This, however, came about after an arduous journey taken by both countries that faced several political hurdles. The Palestinian cause in China's foreign policy remained as one of the stumbling blocks in normalising the ties (Shichor 1994: 191-192).

The changing international order since the late 1980s, increasing antagonism between the Arab countries and initiatives to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict were attributed to the transformation in China's West Asian policy, and Israel in particular (Shichor 1994: 198). Towards the end of the Cold War, considerable military contacts had already been established between Israel and China and emboldened the process of establishing diplomatic ties. It is on this note that this research discusses how Israel's military exports and assistance during the non-relations period led to the establishment of diplomatic relations in January 1992.

As with South Africa, China also benefited from Israeli military transfers and other forms of military assistance such as upgrading. During their pre-normalisation phase military relations, weapons supplied by Israel to China include laser-guided armour piercing warheads, artillery ammunition, electronic fire control systems and cannons for Soviet-made Tanks, night vision equipment, naval equipment, Kfir bombers, TOW anti-tank missiles, and rare metals. In the early 1980s, the Sino-Israeli military transactions stood at US\$3 billion, in the 1990s it rose to US\$5-6 billion (Shichor 2000). The estimated value of Israel's total arms exports from 1994 to 1997 was US\$7.78 billion, or an annual average of US\$556 million. In early 1990s RAND Corporation estimated Israel's annual military transfers to China at US\$1-3 billion (Shichor 2000).

In both the cases, military relations were kept as closely guarded secret. Due to the *apartheid* regime and arms embargoes, Israel had to be cautious about its military dealings with South Africa. Similar was the case with China with which Israel treaded carefully as there was no formal relation. The difficulty in procuring figures of their trade or the exact arms transactions, or kinds of technologies delivered to both the clients was mainly because of the closely-guarded nature of the cooperation. Thus, there are variations on the data of arms business.

The US intervention in Israel's arms exports to both these two countries was clearly noticeable. While the policies under different administrations highly influenced the relations, the US Congress devotes more attention to and exerts influence on military assistance to Israel than any other programmes (Reich 1984: 168-171, Klieman 1985: 167-188.). Further, the US Congress has been the reliable channel for ensuring the transfer of technology to Israel and also for subsidising its arms industry (Rodman 2007, Bahbah 1987c, Inbar 2008, Reiser 1989: 126-142). However, it was the Congressional threat to cancel the annual military and economic aid to that made Israel to halt its arms exports to China and South Africa.

An ambivalent role regarding Israeli arms exports was played by the US and the latter acted both as an advocate and obstacle. Such influence was witnessed when it blocked Israeli sales of certain weapons systems to these two countries. At one time, due to its wider foreign policy and strategic objective, the US was supportive of Israel's arms exports to these two countries. It encouraged, facilitated or at least tolerated the arms diplomacy pursued by Israel. For example, Cold War calculations and the resultant pre-occupation with its containment policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union resulted in the US strengthening Sino-Israeli military ties. Further, the Western sanctions following the Tiananmen incident of 1989 facilitated Israel's emergence as a major military supplier to China. This entry was received well by China as it was undergoing military modernisation programmes and defence industries were developing larger platforms such as jets. These activities were hampered due to the US-led Western arms embargo. Israel by then already gained significant expertise in manufacturing jets, avionics, subsystems, apart from the conventional weapons systems. Its expertise in developing some of these items, and importantly, the upgrading skill on outdated Soviet-era military equipments captured the attention of Chinese defence officials.

The US approach changed significantly following Sino-Israeli normalisation which coincided with the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Since 1992, the US has emerged as the major spoiler of Israel's military-related ties with China. It no longer considered China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union but began to view it as a potential threat in the making (Kumaraswamy 2013a, Shichor 2005). The Sino-Israeli relations, therefore, did not take the usual pattern as the military ties dwindled drastically. Hence, arms sales diplomacy lost their significance.

Similar interventions and pressures from the US contributed to Israel minimising and abandoning its military ties with South African since the early 1990s. In the past the US gave its tacit approval to Israel to re-export some of its equipments to South Africa and was prepared to play down controversies surrounding nuclear cooperation between the two. As its Soviet containment policy, the US did not curb Israel's arms exports and military assistance to the *apartheid* regime between mid-1970s and early mid-1980s. While the third-party intervention did not lead to any controversy, pre-eminence of the American influence on the Israeli-South African military ties was visible since the later part of the mid-1980s. It all began with the growing anti-*apartheid* sentiments within the US, particularly in educational institutions. The US began to apply pressure tactics against those countries, including Israel, which cooperated with *apartheid* regime in military-security fields. The end of the Cold War and *apartheid* regime brought about a shift in the US policy towards Israel's arms exports to South Africa.

Thus, with the change of the international political environment after the end of the Cold War, the US began to see things differently. As a result, Israeli arms exports to China and South Africa became a major irritant in Israel-US relations. The US did not hesitate to use its political and diplomatic leverages vis-à-vis to alter and modify Israel's arms to both these countries.

At the same time, owing to changing security environments and emerging threat perceptions in the 1990s, military-security cooperation between Israel and the US intensified rapidly. In the words of Gerald M. Steinberg,

The combination of the uncertain peace process, questions regarding the future of Russia, proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction in the region (highlighted by but not restricted to the



unresolved Iraqi and developing threats), and continuing terror, have created new challenges for Israeli decision-makers and for the US-Israeli relations (Steinberg 2001: 151).

As a result of these concerns, both of them continue to cooperate continuously despite intermittent difference in viewpoints on some issues. Israel's arms exports have continue to remain one of the most important features of its relations with different clients.

Against the backdrop of this, the research examines the roles of the Israeli arms exports in furthering its foreign policy pursuits, and the influence of the US on its arms transfer programmes, its rationale and scope. This study uses China and South Africa as the cases to examine the role of the US influence over Israel's arms exports and its impact.

#### Review of Literature

The review of literature is divided into four important themes. The first theme deals with the Israeli foreign and security policies in general. The second theme is on the evolution of Israel-US relations. The third theme explores the linkages between arms sales and the foreign policy. The fourth theme deals with Israel's relations with China and South Africa.

#### Israeli Foreign and Security Policy

Since the day Israel was established, its main aim was to gain recognition and acceptance not only in the region but also from different countries beyond West Asia. Due to its location in a hostile environment, it has "lived in a state of siege since the achievement of its independence" (Bialer 1990). As it was created as a country for the Jewish people, ingathering of them from world over became an important foreign policy objective. As a result of this, Israel began to forge relations with those countries, including South Africa, Argentina, Ethiopia and Iran, with sizeable Jewish population (Klieman 1985, Farhang 1989, Parsi 2007). The wellbeing of the Jews became a pivotal objective for the Jewish leaders before and after the state was created. Dowty (1999) addressed how the "Jewish history and experience" affect Israel's domestic politics as well its policymaking for foreign relations. This factor also largely regulated security and military policies, including arms exports. Alan Dowty opined, "A Jewish worldview, the product of unique history and

circumstances, functions as a prism through which policymakers may see and act. The role of interests, particularly in the realm of security, cannot be denied.” Security in terms of territorial sovereignty and the citizens are two of the foreign policy goals. Bernard Reich (2004) gives a detailed analysis by highlighting different policies adopted by Israel beginning from pre-statehood period up to 1990s. In doing so, he juxtaposed distinctly the three intersecting elements of “security, defence and foreign policies.” The comprehensiveness of his analysis lies in his meticulous observation of security and foreign policies during and after major wars Israel fought with the Arab countries. The author aptly described the need for arms and military aid, political and diplomatic back-up both in the international community and forums like the UN due to constant threats from the Arab countries. Reich acknowledged Israel’s inability to assure security despite the success in fighting the Arab adversaries, including the Palestinians.

During the early period after its establishment, Israel did not side with any of the Cold War blocs but adopted a global policy of “non-identification” (Bialer 1991). The primary motive for this position was to receive political, economic and security assistance from both the superpowers—the US and the USSR. Due to the growing encirclement by the adversarial Arab countries, Israel searched for partners well beyond the region, particularly in the Third World. As mentioned by scholars like Leopold Laufer (1972), “For Israel the emergence of the Third World has presented both a challenge and an opportunity. Gaining the acceptance and if possible the friendship of these nations provided the challenge; the opportunity lay in transforming Israel’s own quest for speedy progress.” The author also mentioned about the problems regarding Israel’s right to existence which has been disputed “since the first day of independence”. Under such circumstances, it was compelled “to approach foreign countries in quite a low-profile manner” (Abadi 2004).

Owing to the unfriendliness of the Arab countries, David Ben-Gurion adopted a policy known as “periphery doctrine” in the mid-1950s to broaden his country’s regional reach (Alpher 2015). It was because of this policy that Israel could build strategic relationships with countries on its periphery. Yossi Alpher (1989) highlighted that this doctrine was derived from the perception that “Israel was surrounded by a wall of militant Arab state, led by Nasser’s Egypt, that sought its

total destruction.” Countries, namely Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia and Morocco, along with a few states in Africa, had their fears of the mainstream Arab, and as a result, built alliances with Israel. Along with this, Israel’s peripheral diplomacy was also seen as a means to attract the attentions of the superpowers during the 1950s. This was the time when Israel had immense interest to get closer to the US, particularly for security reasons. Avi Shlaim (2004) has discussed the evolution of Israeli foreign policy from that of “non-alignment in 1948 to close alignment with the West” by mid-1950s. He not only explained this transformation in the foreign policy but also the strategies of the Zionist movement before the state came into existence. He identified two features, that is, “the non-recognition of a Palestinian national entity and the quest for an alliance with a Great Power external to the Middle East.”

The political challenges, which are being faced by Israel since 1948 in forging relations, has been described in some details by Aharon Klieman (1990). Similar to others, he pointed out Israel’s national interest to secure support from leading international actors during the 1950s. Klieman (1994) was of the view that the peace treaty signed by Israel and Egypt in 1979 created a favourable framework for the former’s worldwide diplomatic campaign in the 1990s. He did not attribute Israel’s burgeoning relations with countries such as China, India, Japan, Turkey and the erstwhile Soviet Republics only to the “Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House Lawn on September 1993” (p.11). However, during the earlier period when it was facing heightened political isolation, particularly between late 1960s and 1970s, “Israeli leaders have been quite willing to set aside considerations of pride and diplomatic protocol, and to make their peace with backdoor respectability” (Klieman 1988: 42). In other words, “quiet diplomacy” was promoted to serve a few national interests, including security, trade, the Jewish agenda, and political relations. Cooperation with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asian and Latin American countries were mainly driven by some these interests (Beit-Hallahmi 1987, Bahbah ad Butler 1986, Abadi 2004, Hunter 1987a, Nadelman 1981, Ojo 1988, Rivkin 1959, Kumaraswamy 1994a, Shichor 1994, Reiser 1989).

Foreign policy underwent a sea change in the 1990s due to several international and regional developments. This marked a significant period in terms of Israel’s national security and it “acquired a much better international status” (Inbar 2002: 21). Its

relations with the US were strong wherein the latter increased not only political support but also military aid. On the regional front, the US could bring Israel's adversaries such as the Syria, the Palestinians and the Jordanians to negotiations in Madrid. Efraim Inbar, as others, believed that "the evolving peace process led to important agreements that Israel a more acceptable actor in the region and reduced the chances for additional large-scale Arab-Israeli war" (p.30). Since the early 1950s, security assistance from the West, particularly the US, became an important foreign policy objective. Due to its regional and strategic interests, the US refused to meet the demands for military items from Israel (Gazit 2000, Little 1993). From early 1970s, security demands were met by the US in the form of arms supply and military aid. This was timely as Israel faced a serious political isolation as the Sub-Saharan African countries snapped ties and increased condemnation for its policies towards the Palestinians.

The October War and oil crisis brought a major transformation in its security policy. Eliot Cohen *et al.* (1998) discusses the changing dynamics of the security affairs, including the concept of conscript army, war tactics, military capabilities, quality of the Israeli armed forces as compared to the Arab neighbours, self-reliance for weapons systems and search for "great-power patron." The authors also mentioned about the requirement of large amount of funds required for the upkeep of the military and to preserve security. A caution was made regarding Israel's growing strategic dependence on the US, particularly its reliance on American-origin technology for missiles and non-conventional weapons development programmes. The military strength of Israel between mid-1960s and early 1970s is highlighted by Moshe Dayan (1972) and he emphasised on the level of preparedness for any future war with the hostile neighbours. With the rising political and security challenges from late 1960s and early 1970, the US began to occupy an important position in Israeli foreign policy. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's (1974-1977) strong pro-US orientation brought a gradual shift in the bilateral ties (Inbar 1999). After the October War, the IDF underwent changes in quantitative and qualitative terms, and engaged in rearmament on a large scale (Creveld 1976).

## Israel-United States Relations

It is imperative to understand the establishment of strategic relationship between Israel and the United States. The fundamental change in the American foreign policy after the June War gave Israel a military edge over its neighbours. Under an intense pressure from the US, Israel abandoned its neutral stance (Shichor 1994). This departure reflected Israel's motives to ensure military, economic and strategic assistance from the West, particularly the US (Levey 1995a). The refusal by the US forced Israel to turn towards France as source for arms. A rapprochement between Israel and the US over military-security matters began in the late 1950s although there were no arms transactions. The US officials were worried about the rising influence of the Soviet and the growing radicalism under the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Little 1993).

While President Kennedy sought 'military incentive' to dissuade Israel from pursuing the nuclear option (Ben-Zvi 2009), President Lyndon Johnson's 1968 agreement to sell Israel the Phantom jets marked the change and established the US as Israel's principal arms supplier (Bard and Pipes 1997). Until early 1960s, the US refused to provide major weapon systems to Israel as such move would alienate the Arab countries, and it "did not want to risk a Middle East confrontation with the Soviet Union" (Bard 1988). Although the US did not yet consider Israel as an ally, it began to recognise that the latter could be a bulwark not only against the penetration of the Soviet influence but also against the elements of radicalism. The sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missile to Israel in August 1962 reflected a major shift in the thinking of the US under the Kennedy administration vis-à-vis the American regional interests (Goldman 2009). This author added, "The decision-making process regarding the Hawk sale magnified the importance of JFK's personal understanding of Israel and of the requirements for stability in the region, since the president himself played the decisive role in adjudicating the request for the Hawk."

The 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict consolidated the relationship and the US began to see Israel as a strategic asset (Ben-Zvi 2004a). Since then the US sought to reassure Israel that it remained committed to Israel's security and military advantage over the Arab states (Reich 1985). Then the relationship became that of donor-recipient relationship

(Inbar 1982). At the same time, there were continuous disagreements between Israel and the US over arms export policies (Inbar 2008).

Israel's desire to maintain an independent military-industrial capacity in both research and development and production; for security assistance and economic support, and technology transfer issue paved the way for the defence-industrial cooperation between Israel and the United States (Gold 1992). The Israeli-US arms relationship is considered to be that of patron-client relationship and arms transfers to Israel have also been manipulated to advance American national interest (Rodman 2007). The largest defence project taken up by both Israel and the United States, the Arrow missile project, is considered to be the "centrepiece" of the U.S.-Israeli "strategic cooperation" (Clarke 1994). At the same time, the evolving military relationship also allowed the US to wield greater influence and even veto over Israeli arms sales. This is because Israel, over a period of time, has become a co-producer of various weapons systems with the United States and a major recipient of US technology and scientific data (Reiser 1989).

#### Arms Sales as an Instrument of its Foreign Policy

Arms diplomacy has been an important component of Israel's overtures towards the outside world as it has forged military relations with many countries, some even before the establishment of formal diplomatic. In so doing, it had undergone various phases in pursuing its foreign policy objectives through this military approach (Klieman 1985). Arms sales diplomacy was one of the most important mechanisms which had served its national interest and made through varied stands such as arms sales, technical assistance, training and other forms of military help.

Normally Israel's arms diplomacy with a country does not follow the establishment of diplomatic relationship but rather happens in closed-door or "quiet diplomacy" (Klieman 1988). One of the best examples for such diplomacy is the Iran-Contra Affair whereby Israel pursued 'diplomatic back channels' to reach to the Islamic Republic of Iran which was still professing public hostility. While the Tower Commission (1987) provides the background account, it was the political calculations that compelled Israel to explicit the security situation faced by Iran in the wake of the Iraqi aggression (Segev 1988). The secret friendship the Shah had with Israel gives a

holistic picture of the triangular relations involving Iran, Israel and the U.S during the Iran-Contra affair (Parsi 2007).

The Israeli arms sales began to grow gradually between 1956 and 1967 when Israel significantly altered its relations with the developing nations of Africa and Asia. Israel was seen as a military force after the Suez War of 1956 (Reiser 1989) and most of Israel's arms relationship with the developing world were motivated by political and foreign policy goals and were marginally influenced by economic considerations. As a result, arms sales from 1967 to 1973 were frequently connected to Israel's foreign policy goals.

Israeli defence industry was established to meet the urgent security needs and over the period of time has become one of the largest medium-size arms exporters in the world. Several factors attributed to this paradigm shift, such as security needs, vulnerability to exporters and arms embargoes. These industries, to a great extent, assisted in the promotion of Israel's diplomatic outreach through arms sales (Klieman 1984 and Klieman 1985). The arms embargo imposed by the French President Charles de Gaulle in June 1967 had left a major impact on arms procurement activities and exposed Israel's vulnerability of dependence on external sources for its military requirements (Ziv 2010). Figures like Shimon Peres played an instrumental role in setting up defence industries and the evolution of military science and technology (Peres 1970).

It is imperative to understand the motives and dynamics of the Israeli defence industry. The constant threat to survival of Israel, dependency on external sources of weapons and need for a self-sustaining and an indigenous defence industry were some of the most important factors for the growth of these industries (Sadeh 2001). Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and the prospects for peace during the late 1980s and early 1990s had created a favourable environment for the Israel defence industry which also marked its entry into the international market and increased the value Israeli defence in the global market (Bonen 1994).

Israel's military-industrial development is evolved from the manufacture of small arms and explosives in pre-state local arms industry to the production and modernisation of supersonic fighter aircraft, sophisticated missiles, tanks and various

electronic warfare systems (Hoyt 2007). Unlike the olden days, there is a gradual expansion of the private industrial sector in Israel. Some of the private firms that are active in the arms industry are Koor, Elbit, *El-Op* Electro-Optics, Soltam, Tadiran, Elta Electronics Industries Ltd., etc.

A host of institutions such as IDF, Ministry of Defence (MOD), military industry and Knesset Committee on Foreign Security Affairs play an important role in facilitating as well as regulating Israel's arms sales (Steinberg 1998). There is a greater synergy involving military officials, heads of the arms industry with that of scientific and technical elites. It is because of such linkages that the task of design and production of weapons, according to the experiences and requirements of the IDF, are met successfully (Steinberg 1986 and Steinberg 1983).

Other major weapons manufacturing countries namely the US, USSR, France and Great Britain also used arms sales as a means to promote their foreign relations, and this was noticeable during the Cold War. They deployed this tactic for economic, political and strategic interests (Pierre 1981; Pierre 1982). Hence, arms trade for political purpose was not a new phenomenon. Many of these great powers became directly or indirect with conflicts in some parts of the Third World countries (Luck 1977. The US and the USSR were two of the largest arms exporters during the Cold War (Kegley and Blanton 2015). Iran and Saudi Arabia imported a large volume of arms from the US and the Soviet Union during 1960s and 1970s (Laird 1984). During the 1970s and 1980s, military industries in the Third World were undergoing modernisation, and they banked on the developed Western countries not only for finished products but also for military technologies (Neuman 1984). Due to the defence industrialisation programmes, countries like Brazil, South Africa, Taiwan, Argentina and Venezuela also began to export weapons systems (Schwam-Baird 1997, Batchelor and Willet 1998, Cole 2008, Pierre 1982). The presence of governments, led by military generals, in Latin America and Sub-Saharan African eased Israel's entry into their defence markets (Beit-Hallahmi 1987, Bahbah and Butler 1986). As mentioned by an Israeli exports observer, "Israeli arms manufacturers have reached such a level of production and importance within the Israeli economy that exporting weapons has become an economic imperative", and



added, “Were Israeli defence marketing strategies to fail, it would have a profound impact on Israeli security, economic viability and diplomacy (Friedman 1986b).

### Israel’s Relations with China and South Africa

In January 1950 Israel became the first country to recognise the People’s Republic of China but had to wait for over four decades for a reciprocal gesture from China (Shichor 1994). Since the early 1970s, China has acquired an unprecedented capacity in the West Asian affairs by maintaining diplomatic, cultural and economic relations with most countries in the region (Shichor 1979). There were initial obstacles in establishing a formalised relation between Israel and China and Israel’s policy was influenced and partly dictated by priorities and interest in other regions (Suffot 2000). According to E. Zev Suffot, Israel’s first ambassador to China, Israel’s quest for international recognition and support in the face of hostility and boycott from its immediate neighbours made the Jewish state review its approach towards China (Suffot 1997). Yitzhak Shichor (2010) gives a detailed analysis on the role of the US in delaying the normalisation of the Sino-Israeli relations and observed “The inevitable conclusion is that while bilateral issues had not been an obstacle, the interference of third parties had been responsible for the delay, notably by the United States” (p.1). Jacob Abadi (2004) also described the unwillingness of Israel to antagonise the US, and how it succumbed to the latter’s pressure during the Korean crisis. This was primarily due to Israel’s desire to move closer to the Eisenhower administration in search of military-security assistance.

As a mark of improvement, Israel even joined 75 other states (including Arab states), in voting for China’s entry into the UN on October 1971 by expelling the Republic of China (Taiwan) from that organisation (Segal 1972). Segal made linkages between the “ancient civilisations of China and Israel”, and opined that “both states were born with a strong dose of the ideology of revolution, although the Zionist dream was more socialist than communist on a much smaller scale” (Segal 1972: 196). Despite this, these two countries missed the opportunities to their diplomatic relations in the early and mid-1950s. Constraining factors such as the Korean crisis of June 1950 and Bandung Conference of April 1955 were highlighted by Chen (2012). This author also describes the changing attitude of China from early 1970s, and the establishment of military contacts in Paris in 1975. A similar account of the evolution of the Sino-

Israeli relations is found in Shai (2000) where he analyses different phases underwent by both the countries. The author went a step ahead by describing the probable prospects between the two countries after normalisation. The exclusion of Israel from Bandung Conference due to oppositions from a few Afro-Asian countries has been described by Carol (2012). The nature of cooperation between the Palestinians and China, which was one of the factors for the prolonged absence of diplomatic ties, is highlighted by Wren (1982) and Al-Sudairi (2015). They not only had political relations but also a few Palestinian leaders received guerrilla training in China (*The Milwaukee Journal 1970*).

The establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1992 was the culmination of Israel's long cherished dream and was the result of the changing international environment (Kumaraswamy 1994a). Israel had started to use its technical assistance programme, and military assistance and arms sales to pursue its foreign policy objectives towards China. It was China's drive for military modernisation that facilitated a military cooperation with Israel and eventually led to full political relations.

Developments in the late 1970s somewhat created a common ground for Israel-China relations. This was the time when Israel lost couple of its most profitable arms clients, namely monarchical Iran and South Africa. This in turn pushed the Jewish state into an unprecedented economic crisis leading to shortage of funds for defence research and development. Simultaneously, the post-Mao China began to realise its isolation and began to emerge with economic reform and growth. At this juncture, Israeli seized the opportunity when China began to look for Western arms and military technology (Shichor 1998). However, some argue that the military component of the Sino-Israeli relations has often been exaggerated. The US charges against Israel for its technology transfers to China, at times, were described 'ludicrous'. Instead, he has questioned that the issue no longer remained about unauthorised transfers of US military technology but about "disruption" and "destabilising" East Asian balance of military power (Shichor 2000).

Israel's involvement with the African countries was undoubtedly regarded as the greatest triumph in its diplomacy overture (Beit-Hallami 1987). Israel's mounting aid

to Africa during the 1950s and early 1960s in the form of technical help, joint commercial ventures and military assistance became an important part of its foreign policy objectives. Israel used these instruments to gain political influence and to escape her isolation (Jacob 1971). The emergence of decolonised and newly independent countries in Africa had made Israel come up with a strong policy “keeping with Afro-Asian aspirations for economic development and modernisation” (Reich 2004: 131). Bernard Reich (1964) further mentioned that Israel’s foreign policy in Africa was constituted of “exchange and training programmes, technical assistance, joint economic enterprises, loans and trade”. The affinities felt by the Jews with the suffering of the Africans, their humiliations and racial discrimination are described by Oded (2010). He succinctly explains the nature of cooperation between Israel and the Sub-Saharan African countries until the ties were broken in October 1973. The factors leading to the improvement of relations between these countries since the early 1980s have also been explained by the author.

Israel’s overall reach in Africa, however, declined after the Arab-Israeli 1973 War because of the growing influence of Arab countries in international organisations, including the Organisation of African Unity (OAU); growing awareness in Africa of the Palestinian movements and Israel’s closer politico-military ties South Africa since the 1950s and its aid to colonial powers such as Portugal. In the initial stages, Israel expressed its opposition to the *apartheid* regime in South Africa and sought to build relations with the independent African nations. However, the two major wars fought by Israel with the Arabs in 1967 and 1973 created an incentive for Israel to export arms and cultivated relations with South Africa (Polakow-Suransky 2011).

Israel’s relationship with South Africa evoked strong criticisms and condemnations and Israel was denounced for bearing the main responsibility for the survival of the *apartheid* regime (Peters 1992). It was argued that the basis for their relationship is a “communality of interest and a shared racist ideology” and the relation was termed as an “unholy alliance” (p.147). Authors like Allan L. Kagedan have argued that there is nothing ideological or sentimental about Israel’s military relations with South Africa. He is of the view that Zionism has become an arm of the new imperialism intent on enslaving the people of the Third World (Kagedan 1987).

Israel and South Africa had undergone different phases starting from the time of Balfour Declaration of 1917. Stevens (1971) studied the South African support for Zionism even before the state of Israel was established, and similar argument was made by Shimoni (1980). Despite this linkage, South Africa showed its reluctance to upgrade the ties by opening its consulate in Israel (Cefkin 1988/89).

Israel-South Africa relations began to grow especially after the visit of the South African Prime Minister Johannes Vorster to Israel in 1976. His visit bolstered Israel's arms supply to South Africa. Israel's decision to supply Kfir fighters came as part of an effort to "raise badly needed foreign exchange by aggressively pushing exports" (MERIP 1976a). Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) played a crucial role in supplying arms to South Africa, such as Gabriel sea-to-sea missiles and Dabur model patrol boats. There was an enormous initial gulf that existed between Israel's declared position against the *apartheid* and the continuation of its ties with this African country. Naomi Chazan has argued that the "most interesting group of concerns behind Israel's South African ties lie in the military-strategic category" (Chazan 1983).

The Israeli-South African military cooperation happened at a time when both the countries were increasingly facing isolation not only in their respective regions but also from the international community. In order to evade frequent arms embargoes and reduce dependence on non-reliable arms suppliers, both had begun defence indigenisation programmes. Such commonly shared security and political challenges spurred collaboration in defence (Adams 1984). The military ties were concentrated more on Israel's arms exports, developing and financing of weapons systems, counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing (Peters 1992). Considering the robustness of the cooperation, it is acknowledgeable that Israel assisted considerably in the growth of South Africa's defence industry.

The literature available on Israel's relations with the US, China and South Africa is focused mostly on the bilateral aspects where military cooperation was one of the salient features. While doing so, the importance of Israel's arms exports in promoting its foreign relations has not been explained sufficiently. In both the case studies, it was primarily the military ties which sustained the relations until Israel was

pressurised by the US to stop selling arms to South Africa and China. Although different patterns of Israel's arms export have been identified for both the case studies, there is a serious lack of data on the volume of its arms trade exports to China and South Africa.

#### Rationale and the scope of the Study

Bilateral relations of Israel have already been studied but the linkages between its arms exports and the foreign policy needs adequate attention. Israeli arms exports have become an important instrument of its foreign policy pursuits. In some cases, arms sales even facilitated politico-diplomatic relations. Most of the military relations Israel forged with different countries were supported by the US, and this was a Cold War phenomenon, that is, its containment policy towards the erstwhile USRR. However, with the change of the international environment since the late 1980s, the US started to show displeasure over Israeli arms exports, especially to countries like South Africa and China. The factors behind such American concerns over the Jewish state's arms export programmes need to be analysed thoroughly. It was also the change in the foreign policy orientations of the South African government after the demise of the *apartheid* regime that altered its military relations with Israel. There has been some work done on the influence of the US on Israeli arms exports to countries like China, while such third party interference in the case of South Africa has not been studied adequately. Hence this research has made an attempt to fill the knowledge-gap of the influence of the US in Israeli arms export policies and its implications.

Significant acceleration in Israel's arms exports began following the June war which spurred its drive for self-sufficiency in arms. This was also the period when military relations with South Africa became intensified. The cancellation of the Phalcon deal in September 2000 was the most defining moment in Israel's military relations with China. Hence the proposed research seeks 1967 and 2000 as the time frame.

Topics related to the military exports are sensitive and are discussed less in the public domain. This is a noticeable phenomenon in the Israeli case. Its military cooperation with China and South Africa were carried out in utmost secrecy. This was primarily because international isolation and criticism against the *apartheid* regime increased from late 1970s and early 1980s. On the other hand, there was absence of official

relations with China. As a result, the timing was unpleasant to disclose the exact nature of their cooperation. Due to these sensitivities, Israel became reluctant to talk openly about its military ties with these two countries. Under such circumstances, those who did not appreciate Israel's ties with China and South Africa often exaggerated the magnitude of its arm exports. In many instances, military assistance and arms exports were viewed critically as they were considered to be one of the important factors for the sustenance of the *apartheid* regime and human rights violations in China. As a result of this, it remains a real challenge to manage the extreme argument over their military cooperation. In the light of this, there is a need for further exploration on the role of arms exports in promoting Israel's foreign policy with some of its major clients.

### Research Questions

1. How does Israel seek to promote its foreign policy interest through military sales?
2. What factors contribute to the US influences over Israel's arms export policy during and after the Cold War period?
3. What kinds of defence technologies did the US block Israel from exporting to China and South Africa?
4. What has been the status of Israel's relations with China and South Africa in the absence of arms trade?

### Hypotheses

1. Israel's dependence on the United States for military and economic assistance restrains its arms export policies.
2. Arms sales were critical for Israel's political relations with South Africa.
3. Military relations facilitated political relations between Israel and China.

### Research Methodology

This research is deductive in its approach and examines the Israeli arms sales within the context of following parameters: arms sales as a foreign policy instrument; influence of the US over Israel's arms trade; extent of Israeli dependence upon the US concurrence and consent; extent of arms sales in Israel's relations with China and

South Africa and role of the US vis-à-vis Israel's arms trade, especially towards these two countries.

Due to certain limitations of getting primary sources, a major volume of information is obtained from the secondary sources available. This problem in getting the primary sources is attributed to the non-availability of the well informed data on arms sales. The sensitive nature of the military cooperation and arms trade also added to the difficulty in obtaining official documents. However, Primary sources used for this research include reports published by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Research Service (CRS) and other US Congressional sources, reports published by the Knesset Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee and the US State Department. As for secondary sources, data and the relevant information are collected from the books and articles which are available in this university, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, and also from the library of Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

The field trip to Israel that was conducted between October 2010 and May 2011 not only helped in collecting materials related to this study but also provided an opportunity to gather insights from various experts—academicians and strategic analysts—who have already dealt on the topic of this research. The information gathered from the interactions with them enriched the arguments in this research.

The second chapter examines how arms sales acted as an instrument of Israeli foreign policy and highlights factors behind such diplomacy, including diplomatic incentives, commercial motives and concern for the well being of the Jewish Diaspora. This chapter begins with a brief analysis about how major weapons manufacturing countries such as the US, USSR, France and Great Britain used arms sales to pursue their foreign relations. Then, the contributing factors for the establishment of defence industries are highlighted, and how they played crucial roles in Israel's arms sales diplomacy. Political and security challenges which were faced by Israel have also been examined. The ending part of the chapter discusses the different patterns of arm trade.

The third chapter examines the historical background to the Sino-Israeli normalisation and the role of the Israeli arms sales diplomacy. The chapter begins by analysing the

factors which delayed the establishment of diplomatic relations. Then, it discusses the developments, particularly within the Chinese political systems, which led to the improvement of contacts with Israel. The time frame for this section is between early 1970s and late 1980s. The chapter highlights the kind of military-security relations that prevailed before and after their normalisation. In all, it offers a comprehensive understanding of how Israeli military assistance facilitated its relations with China.

The fourth chapter examines Israel's military relations with South Africa. At the outset, the chapter highlights the prolonged relations between Israel and the Sub-Saharan nations and their causes, courses and the consequences. The emphasis is on the military-security cooperation which existed robustly until the October War and Oil Crisis, both occurred in 1973. The chapter then discusses the factors behind the rapprochement of Israel-South Africa relations and brings out cooperation in the field of weapons sales, technology transfers, joint ventures, military exercises and alleged nuclear cooperation. The nature of their relationships is also substantiated by the magnitude of the volumes of the arms exports from Israel. It would also give an analysis of the state of affairs between the two countries and role of the military relations. Apart from traditional arms trade, the chapter discusses the cooperation in the field of air force, navy, intelligence sharing and counterterrorism measures. The chapter ends by describing the emergence of international pressure against the *apartheid* regime, and how it impacted on the Israeli-South African military cooperation.

The fifth chapter explains the influences exerted by the US on Israeli arms exports. Factors such as US strategic interest, commercial challenges and competitiveness in the arms trade are highlighted. This chapter explains the different phases underwent by both countries. The reasons for the refusal of the US to Israel's request for arms and how the former changed its arms transfer policies from early 1960s are discussed. Equal importance is given to the expansion of the Israeli-US relations after the October War and the emergence of the US as the largest provider of military aid and technology. This chapter ends by highlighting the extent to which the US wielded veto power, and acted as an advocate and obstacle to Israel's military ties with some of the countries in Latin America and Asia.



The sixth chapter discusses the role of the US in Israel's arms export policies towards China and South Africa. This chapter analyses the similarities and differences between the two cases. It examines how the US changed the course of Israel's relations with China and South Africa. Major controversies that engulfed Israel and the US over the issue of the former's alleged re-transfers of American-origin technologies, particularly to China, are addressed. A detailed discussion is available on the interventionist role of the US in the Israeli-South African military cooperation and the chapter highlights the changing policies of the US vis-à-vis *apartheid* regime, and how it pressurised Israel to completely halt its military ties.

The seventh chapter presents the main findings of the research and verifies the hypotheses outlined at the beginning.

## Chapter Two

# Arms Sales as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

**A**rms sales in the furtherance of foreign policy interests are not a new phenomenon and had become a dominant pattern from the 1950s, especially within the context of the Cold War. Major weapons manufacturing countries such as the United States (US), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), France and Great Britain had used arms sales to pursue their economic, strategic and political interests in different parts of the world and in some cases established strong political relations through such transactions. A heightened usage of this tactic was visible during the intensification of the Cold War with the US and USSR supplying weapons to their allies and clients.

For the superpowers, arms sales emerged as a key component of their efforts to entice partners and a powerful route to pursuing strategic objectives (Pierre 1982, Stohl and Grillot 2009). Discussing the involvement of major countries in a troubled region Edward C. Luck makes the following observation:

As the great powers become more directly involved in a region through the transfer of arms and related personnel, local disputes may become polarized and assume at least a symbolic importance in the global East-West struggle. There is always a danger that such a local conflict could escalate into an East-West military confrontation, particularly if one of the local client states suffers a serious defeat and calls on its more powerful benefactor for military assistance (Luck 1977: 172).

For example, during the Cold War years, particularly between mid-1970s and late 1980s, the US and the Soviet Union alone supplied US\$325 billion worth of arms to their clients and allies (Kegley and Blanton 2015: 238).

Over a period of time, arms sales as a foreign policy tool had gained significance, and had emerged as one of the most important dimension of world politics (Pierre 1981: 266). Even others, including smaller arms manufacturing countries such as Brazil and South Africa began viewing arms exports as economic as well as political instruments. Arms sales, thus, became a major strand in international affairs and were seen as an important component of foreign policy formulation.

Several factors have been attributed for the surge in arms exports. One of the salient factors was the quantum increase of weapons sales during the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War rivalry and the Vietnam War. Along with the US and USSR, former colonial powers France and Britain joined the competition and international arms trade intensified in the wake of the oil crisis of 1973 and petrodollars by oil-rich Arab countries. The quality of weapons also improved and technologically advanced countries invested heavily in the sophistication of their weapons systems, and laid major emphasis on Research and Development (R&D) programmes.

As demands for sophisticated weapons increased, cost of production became high. As a result, it became imperative for major arms producing countries to export their inventories. Beginning with the Czech deal of April 1955, the Soviet Union became the major supplier of weapons to Arab countries, especially Egypt, which were confronting Israel. For instance, estimated Soviet military aid to Egypt between the Suez Crisis of 1956 and June 1967 War was US\$1.5 billion (Srebrnik 2015). Western countries, initially France and later the US, were the principal arms suppliers to Israel. During 1950-1991, five principle arms exporters, namely, the US, USSR, United Kingdom (UK), France and Germany, sold US\$109.94 billion arms to their clients (SIPRI).

**Table 2-1** indicates worldwide arms deliveries by major weapons manufacturing countries during the final years of the Cold War. **Table 2-2** gives the value of arms deliveries by the major weapons exporters to West Asia during the same period.

The qualitative advancement of arms that took place in most of the weapons producing countries could also be attributed to the rising trend of using arms sales as foreign policy instrument. During the 1970s and 1980s, global armament industries underwent a higher degree of sophistication (Neuman 1984), and simultaneously, there was an increasing demand for arms from the Third World countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, due to several internal discords and territorial disputes. Arms supplied to these countries by major traditional suppliers were more advanced and modern than the obsolete and surplus systems which were sold in the past. The US-made F-15s and Soviet-made MiG-19s were made available to various conflict affected areas.

**Table 2-1:** Worldwide Arms Exports Estimated by CIA, 1987-1991 (in US\$ Billion)

<b>Country</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991</b>
Soviet Union	28.8	26.3	22.6	17.0	7.7
United States	20.5	19.2	12.4	9.6	13.5
France	6.9	6.9	6.9	7.5	3.1
United Kingdom	5.9	2.9	4.3	5.3	3.6
China	2.5	4.2	2.4	1.3	0.8
Total	64.6	59.5	48.6	40.7	28.7

**Source:** Congressional Budget Office 1992: 15.

**Table 2-2:** Major Arms Deliveries to West Asia, 1987-1991 (in US\$ Billion)

<b>Country</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991</b>
Soviet Union	5.8	3.5	1.7	1.3	0.1
United States	5.1	1.7	0.3	3.1	3.2
France	1.7	1.2	1.5	1.2	0.4
United Kingdom	0.7	0.8	1.7	1.0	0.2
China	2.2	1.6	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	15.5	8.8	5.3	6.7	4.0

**Source:** SIPRI 1992

During the 1970s, the largest portion of global arms sales went to the West Asian region. Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia imported arms from Western countries, particularly the US, with two-thirds of US-origin arms between late 1960s and 1970s being supplied to these countries. During this period, the Soviet Union sold 70 percent of its weapons systems exports to the Arab countries (Laird 1984: 196). This was the time when it gave primacy to its conventional arms modernisation programmes:

Soviet arms exports to the developing countries are an increasingly important source of the hard currency needed to pay for Soviet imports from the West. In the 1970s, the Soviet Union shifted from a policy of using arms primarily for geopolitical influence toward a policy that also provided economic benefits by requiring hard-currency payments for arms from virtually all of its customers (Ibid: 197).

The rising importance attached to the development of indigenous armament industries, particularly in the developing countries, was another factor for the increase in arms exports.

The growth in international arms trade led to the entry of second-tier countries such as Argentina (Bromley and Inigo 2010: 166-177), Brazil (Schwam-Baird 1997), South Africa (Batchelor and Willet 1998), Taiwan (Cole 2006) and Venezuela (Pierre 1982: 323-254). Some of them developed niche areas and loyal customers. While economic gains were the prime incentive, there were also strategic calculations; South Africa and Taiwan, for example, sought to emerge from their political isolations through arms trade while Latin American exports were a spinoff of modernisation of their defence industries. Uncertainties over and disruption of supplies spurred some of these countries to pursue domestic military industries which in turn spurred arms exports. In the words of Andrew J. Pierre,

These trends in the transfer of arms must be viewed as an integral part of the broader transformation in the international system. As is well recognised, the world is undergoing a diffusion of power, political and economic, from the industrialised states to the developing nations. There is an important military component to that diffusion as well. The acquisition of conventional arms often sophisticated and in far larger quantities than the recipient states have previously possessed, is a critical element of that diffusion (Pierre 1981: 269).

Thus, while arms exports by the Superpowers were driven by Cold War calculations, smaller and emerging arms suppliers had different objectives. Political isolation and supply uncertainties drove them to seek the indigenisation route towards self-sufficiency. Both to economise the scale of production and to fund modernisation and R&D, they looked to exports. Initially export items were largely obsolete and surplus weapons but gradually they began exporting weapons produced locally (Neuman 1984, Aronson 1985). Even while receiving major weapons and systems from the superpowers, these countries began exporting small quantities of arms and electronic items. What began as an economy-driven enterprise soon gained political influence when these smaller players realised the diplomatic gains of arms exports in furthering their political objectives or minimizing the capabilities of their opponents.

Israel's policy, in many ways, follows the pattern of the second-tier arms exporting countries. Indeed, the evolution of the defence industry paralleled the state and its security challenges. At one level, it needed a continuous flow of modern arms to meet its security challenges but on the other, either they were not available or suppliers were not dependable. This demand-supply gap compelled Israel's leaders to consider

indigenous production of arms, ammunitions and platforms or improvisation and modernisation of items procured from abroad. Towards meeting the perennial demands for modern arms, Israel adopted a policy of domestic military industry and modernisation, eventually leading to its emergence as a major player in international arms trade. In other words, the evolution, development and modernisation of defence industry was the key to Israel emerging as a major arms supplier and the factors which compelled Israel to seek self-sufficiency in defence production were not different from the challenges faced by its foreign policy establishment, namely, demand for dependable allies but their short-supply.

#### Evolution of Arms Industry

Ever since its establishment in May 1948, Israel has been an important player in international arms trade, both as a recipient and exporter. Beginning with rudimentary small scale efforts during the pre-state period, it has become one of the major arms exporters since the 1980s. It not only exports arms to developed and developing countries but in some niche areas competes with the largest defence suppliers such as the US, France, Russia and Britain. Over a period of time, particularly from mid-1960s, arms sales gradually became an important instrument of its foreign policy, and the factors for this are addressed subsequently in this section. The success achieved by the Israeli arms industry and exports has been a result of careful manoeuvring of several boycotts and arms embargoes imposed by some of its one-time allies.

During the pre-statehood period, the Jews living in Palestine had no or limited access to weapons unlike the Arab population that was able to procure its arms and ammunitions from Europe. It was in 1929 when the first wave of anti-Jewish riots broke out in Mandate Palestine that the *yishuv* (Jewish residents) decided to establish a nascent arms industry (Steinberg 1983: 279). Most of these activities were carried out in clandestine workshops located in various agricultural settlements and in semi-urban areas. Through these initiatives, the Jews could manufacture rudimentary small arms and ammunitions to protect themselves from the armed Arabs.

The shortage of weapons was a major challenge facing the *yishuv* in the 1948 War when its adversaries namely, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq fought the war with weapons supplied by the Soviet Union (Ginat 1996: 324). Israel was left without any

military backup and relied heavily upon Czechoslovakia for its crucial needs. Preliminary contacts in this direction began in April 1947—more than a year before the formation of Israel—when the *yishuv* procured significant quantities of weapons that were discarded at the end of the Second World War. Among others, it obtained 4,500 Mauser K-98 Model P18 7.92 mm rifles or “Czech Rifles”; 200 MG-34 machine guns or MAGLAD; 200 K-98 rifles, and 150,000 bullets (Ben-Tzur 2006). In July 1947, Moshe Sneh, an emissary of the Jewish Agency in Europe met Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Clementis and discussed arms procurement and as a follow up a Jewish Agency team was sent to that country in November. Just before the outbreak of the 1948 war, the Jewish forces received large volumes of arms from Czechoslovakia including included Avia S-199 fighter airplane; 1,100 ZB37 ("BESA") heavy machine guns, about 5,000 MG-34 machine guns, 24,760 "Czech rifles" and 52,440,000 7.92 mm bullets; 50 Spitfire fighter aircrafts (Ibid.). The transfers of these weapons were largely carried out with the encouragement of the Soviet Union (Lewis 1999: 366). The socialist orientation of Zionism gave hope that the future state would be “pro-Soviet” (Ben-Tzur 2006). The Soviet recognition of Israel on 17 May 1948 and its support for Israel’s membership of the United Nations (UN) in May 1949 were indicative of the favourable attitude of the Eastern Bloc countries. Furthermore, the Soviet Union wanted to take advantage of the US arms embargo in the region and expand its interests.

The Czech supplies happened at a time when decision makers were confronted with formulating Israel’s foreign policy orientations. The newly-born state needed both the East and West and was not prepared to get embroiled in the Euro-centric Cold War.

As Elie Podeh sums up:

The Prospects of Massive Jewish immigration from the Eastern Bloc and the relative strength of the leftist parties in Israeli politics militated against a tendency toward the West. Consequently, Israeli decision-makers developed a policy known as “non-identification.” Yet the long association-sometimes even cooperation- between the Zionist movement and Britain and the United States during the mandate period made Israel more prone to develop a Western Orientation (Podeh 1999: 122).

As Israel depended heavily on weapon imports, the cost factor became an economic burden. Discussing the Israeli-Czechoslovakian arms trade, Uri Bialer remarks,



... that arms, including heavy weapons continued to come from Czechoslovakia until 1951, through the activities of Israel's only full-scale arms purchasing ("Rechesh") mission in the Eastern bloc. The cost of planned Israeli acquisitions from Czechoslovakia in 1950 comprised no less than 25 percent of the total budget for arms imports at that time (Bialer 1991).

The demand for arms from the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), established in May 1948 grew after the end of the War, particularly after Israel signed a series of Armistice Agreements with its Arab adversaries in the first half of 1949. Contrary to expectations, these agreements did not result in a lasting peace.

Meanwhile, Israel's security concerns increased due to two closely linked developments; while neighbouring Arab countries managed to procure arms, its supply chains became unreliable.

The US political support was crucial for the UN approval of the Partition Plan in November 1947 but this was not accompanied by any significant military support during the run up to the 1948 war. Besides Czechoslovakia, Israel could not procure arms from any other sources during this period. For a short period, Israel sought to befriend both the Eastern and Western Blocs through its policy of 'non-identification' but this approach did not survive for long as the US-USSR Cold War antagonism increased and Israel was forced to abandon its policy. In June 1950, amidst the Korean War, Israel was confronted with the 'for-or-against-us' attitude of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and moved closer to the US. Meanwhile, towards the end of his life Joseph Stalin adopted a hostile posture towards Israel. Due to these developments, the supply of Czech weapons to Israel ceased in 1951 (Bialer 1985b: 307-315).

This was not accompanied by Israel finding alternative supply routes. Fears over the Soviet Union gaining footholds in the region inhibited the US from acceding to repeated Israeli request for arms (discussed in Chapter Five). Detailing the Cold War strategy of the US, Stewart Reiser observes,

Because the reasons behind increased U.S. involvement in the heartland of the Middle East required soliciting Arab support against the Soviet Union, the United States found it necessary to limit its own support of Israel. Thus as Israel attempted to secure itself through arms

purchases from the United States, the United States was trying to win over the Arab states to an anti-Soviet position (Reiser 1989: 20).

In other words, the US did not want to antagonise the Arab countries in the wake of Soviet penetration into the region by providing military-security assistance to Israel.

The vulnerability of depending on external powers was exposed further by the Tripartite Declaration signed by the US, UK and France on 25 May 1950. The Tripartite Declaration proved to be harmful to Israel at two levels. The signatories, especially the US, were not prepared to violate their embargo on arms supplies. More importantly, the Arab neighbours of Israel did not suffer from a similar arms embargo and managed to procure arms not only from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia but also from these three signatories. Jordan received arms from Britain under the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of March 1948, Saudi Arabia procured arms from the US, and Italy and France supplied arms to Egypt (Ziv 2010: 408). A meaningful shift occurred in 1954 when Israel explored military ties with France which blossomed into strategic partnership amidst the Suez Crisis of 1956. This paved the way for the supply of a significant number of high-quality weapons systems throughout the 1950s (Evron 1970: 82-83, Ziv 2010: 407-427).

Between 1950 and 1955, Israel's arms suppliers were Italy and Sweden and it managed to receive some amount of modern equipments such as tanks and aircrafts (Jabber 1981: 112, Mott 2002: 176). The US and Canada provided "used World War II army surplus equipment, such as spare plane parts, landing craft, launchers, machine guns, armour-piercing shells, and Mosquito planes" (Reiser 1989: 21). Despite its desire and request for military and economic aid, Israel was excluded from the Baghdad Pact established in February 1955 comprising of Great Britain, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq (Sanjian 1997: 226). As the military bloc was created to counter Soviet penetration into West Asia, the West was wary of Israel's membership. Owing to the antagonism between Israel and the Arab states, radical states like Egypt were of the view that "The real threat to their security emanated not from the Soviet Union but from Israel. Consequently, they were not prepared to join any defence organization of which Israel was a member" (Shlaim 1999: 178). Meanwhile the Czech-Egyptian arms deal which was announced in September 1955 further increased

Israel's insecurity and altered its security dynamics (Ramazani 1959: 356-373). This precipitated the eventual emergence of the US as an arms supplier for Israel.

Over time, the Tripartite Declaration became a turning point for Israel as then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion intensified efforts towards developing a defence industrial base to overcome the security challenges. Establishment of a string of defence industries became pivotal for the country's existence and security. Even though France emerged as an arms supplier since 1955, Israel's diplomatic leverage remained limited. During this year, another international event exposed Israel's non-acceptance by various countries of Asia and Africa. Israel was excluded from the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung in April 1955 and this paved the way for its eventual exclusion from the emerging block of Third World countries (Kochan 1976: 250-269). According to the US State Department,

The core principles of the Bandung Conference were political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. These issues were of central importance to all participants in the conference, most of which had recently emerged from colonial rule. The governments of Burma, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka co-sponsored the Bandung Conference, and they brought together an additional twenty-four nations from Asia, Africa and the Middle East (US State Department 1955).

It became evident that Arab countries succeeded in preventing Israel from participating in such regional meetings and organisations in future.

The Bandung Conference signified an important achievement for the Arab countries, with Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett regarding the resolution on the Palestine "as a humiliating defeat for Israel" and feeling compelled to "sent a telegram of protest to the chairman of the conference, to the president of Indonesia, expressing deep regret for not inviting Israel and for adopting an anti-Israel resolution" (Oded 2010: 123). This conference not only isolated Israel in the region but also took away its opportunities for normalising ties with China and India. The Arab world, in the eyes of both these Asian countries, "offered better political opportunities, especially over the issues that were critical for them at the United Nations, namely the Kashmir dispute for India and UN membership for China" (Kumaraswamy 2010: 195). Israel did not have diplomatic relations with China despite its recognition of the latter in

January 1950. It took them more almost four decades to normalise their relations in 1992. The Indo-Israeli relations also followed a similar trajectory. The normalisation of Sino-Israeli relation which was facilitated by Israel's arms sales is discussed in Chapter Three.

### Arms Industries

Israel felt the need for robust arms industries as it faced political isolation as well as uncertainty over its weapons imports from major exporters. These challenges prompted Ben-Gurion to speed up the production of weapons within the country to meet the rising security demands of the IDF, and promoted exports at later stages. While it could procure military equipments from its newly-found partner France, further options to purchase sophisticated systems remained limited. At the same time, the demand from the IDF increased manifold due to escalated tensions with the neighbouring Arab countries. Items developed and manufactured by the industries were consumed by the IDF and those obsolete weapons systems captured during its wars with the Arab states since 1948 went through upgrades. As much as the defence industries attained a degree of sophistication, the needs for more advanced weapons also increased. These advancements were triggered by the heightened level of threats from the neighbouring countries which were supplied with modern equipments by the Soviet Union.

Surplus productions as well as weapons captured from the Arab armies were exported to various clients for economic and political purposes. Over a period of time, arms exports began to serve an “intermediate link between political and foreign policy incentives, on the one hand, and economic motives on the other. Like them, the security argument reflects the close interplay between the logic of necessity and of opportunity” (Klieman 1984: 18). The following section gives a brief overview of the evolution of a few prominent defence industries, their principal inventories and their contribution to and shares in the overall arms exports.

Ben-Gurion played a significant role in converting the “scattered and primitive factories left over from the Haganah period into a military industry. In 1951, his orders to form an aircraft company began to be carried out, with the formation of Bedek in 1953 representing a modest start” (Klieman 1985: 17). Gradually, Israel

began to achieve a degree of self-sufficiency in the production of small arms and mortars, and skills were acquired for the modification and overhauling of tanks, aircrafts and electronic system. Beginning from the mid-1950s, the defence industries began expanding, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) played a crucial role.

Three major defence industries were established during the 1950s under the direct control of the MoD. They were Israel Military Industries (IMI); Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) or “Bedek”, and the National Weapons Development Authority, also known as Rafael. Shimon Peres, who was the Director-General in the MoD in 1952 and also the Deputy Defence Minister from 1953 to 1965, was the most important figure in the evolution of military science and technology (Peres 1970). The success of arms sales diplomacy which was assisted by the growth of defence industries was the direct result of his ambitious projects and undertakings. Reflecting on his role, Aharon Klieman remarks, “Much of the credit is owed to David Ben-Gurion’s vision of Israel as militarily strong and industrialised, but also to the persistence and administrative skills of Shimon Peres” (Klieman 1984: 10-11).

In the initial years, Israel could not offset the trade imbalances created due to its heavy import of arms. Notwithstanding limited production, during the early 1950s, it pursued a limited quantities of exports to Holland, Burma (later Myanmar), Belgium, Turkey and Italy. The earliest known arms sales to Burma happened in August 1954 when it exported approximately 30 Spitfires at the cost of US\$1 million, along with 50,000 rifles reconditioned at the cost of over US\$700,000 (Ibid.). The remaining countries continued to import arms throughout the 1950s.

These exports were driven by economic considerations as Israel’s defence-related imports remained high. In the 1960s, this stood at US\$1.5 billion and in the next decade went up to US\$15 billion (Steinberg 1983: 298). As Reiser describes,

Establishment of Bedek and Tadiran [another Israeli defence firm] and expansion of TAAS during Israel’s first half-decade of existence occurred without the benefits of either significant foreign sources of capital or technological cooperation between Israel and any developed industrial nation. The substantial expansion of these industries was facilitated by the Israeli government’s accumulation of foreign exchange, which was made possible by both reparations and restitutions received from West Germany and a shift in Israel’s relationship with France. This newly formed partnership with France

resulted from changing patterns among the great powers in the Middle East (Reiser 1989: 31).

Economic compulsions were one of the principal reasons which spurred arms exports in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As the IDF was the main consumer of the domestic production, the national burden to bear the entire cost of R&D programmes increased, and so were the capital investments. These compelled the arms industries to see exports as an effective cost cutting measure. The need to economise cost led to surplus production which could only be directed to the external market. Domestic production, however, did not result in self-sufficiency and Israel continued to import critical arms and platforms from France during the 1950s and mid-1960s. Around this time, the Soviet Union provided Egypt with more advanced weapons systems thereby increasing Israel's threat perceptions. The pre-1967 period also witnessed a greater American reluctance to accede to its requests for modern weapons

Despite their support for the Partition Plan and Israel's admission into the UN, the Super Powers were less accommodative of Israel's request for arms. For a while, France filled up the void during 1956- 1967. In the words of Reiser,

...in contrast to the sense of isolation that marked the first half-decade, 1956 began a decade of a collaborative, mutually beneficial, and creative relationship with France. As a result of this relationship, Israel was able for the first time in its history to purchase first-line offensive weapons from a European producer (Ibid: 38).

The close military-security ties between these two countries were shattered by the June war and the French imposition of arms embargo against Israel.

Around this time, other advanced nations, including the US, began to gradually open their arsenals to Israel. The US facilitated a limited quantity of arms through the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Great Britain (Ben-Zvi 2004a: 48). The nature of Israel-US relations during the 1950s and 1960s is analysed in Chapter Five. As a part of the reparations agreement signed between Israel and West Germany on 10 September 1952, the latter agreed to pay a hefty amount over the treatment and persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. The amount was estimated at US\$715

million (Belkin 2007: 2) and by 1954 part of this money was used by Israel for purchasing patrol boats, tanks and arms (Schwartz 2014: 35).

Eventually, the total reparations paid to Israel would reach between \$25 and \$30 billion, according to various estimates, including post-unification reparations given on behalf of East Germany. The amount paid out through various programs to all survivors worldwide is vastly higher, with some estimates as high as \$100 billion (Ibid.).

Ties between these two countries improved and diplomatic relations were established in May 1965. This paved the way for close but confidential military and intelligence cooperation began between the two. “Successive German leaders have remained committed to far-reaching defence cooperation with Israel” and the latter continues to remain one of the top recipients of German military technology (Belkin 2007: 5). A few analysts have asserted that German-made arms played a pivotal role during the 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982 Wars (Feldman 2012: XV, Belkin 2007: 5).

It was the French involvement that brought about a technical evolution in the Israeli arms industries. Before the advent of this relationship, most of Israel’s jets were sent to France for servicing and repairs. Events leading up to the Suez Crisis fundamentally altered Israel’s arms procurement process. By establishing a robust arms trade, “France not only secured a large export market which became increasingly important for her arms industry, but also regained some tacit presence in the Middle East” (Evron 1970: 83). Emphasis was given to co-production wherein France provided the technology to Israel for the production of Fouga Magister jet trainers.

Moreover, as the external source for military technology was limited, Israeli government gave a great deal of attention to R&D programmes. In the words of Gerald Steinberg,

... in order to offset the demographic imbalance in the region, Israel has sought to maintain qualitative weapon superiority and technological innovation. New technology is imported as rapidly as it can be obtained and partly for this reason, co-production of weapons system has become a major goal... (Steinberg 1983: 292).

France assisted Israel in achieving some of the above-mentioned goals when their relations were cordial.

The ascendance of General Charles de Gaulle as the Prime Minister of France in May 1958, and later as President, marked the decline of the special relationship between Israel and France and resulted in the revival of the “traditional French policy in the Middle East” (Evron 1970: 83). As observed by Guy Ziv,

The new French leader committed himself to ending the war in Algeria, where rebels were fighting for total independence for France. A high priority for de Gaulle was for France to improve its position in the Arab world. In the wake of this new policy, Israel’s strategic importance to France diminished and the period of close French-Israeli relations came to an end (Ziv 2010: 427).

A rapid warming of relations between France and the Arab countries began from 1962, particularly after Maurice Couve de Murville became Foreign Minister in June 1958. The June War decisively ended the decade old special relationship and on 5 June—the day the war began—President Gaulle imposed an arms embargo against Israel. This mainly targeted the aviation sector, and affected the delivery of 50 Mirage V jets which Israel had ordered from France in late 1966. These fighters were meant to supplement the Mirage IIIs, the main striking force of the Israeli Air Force (IAF), and around 15 Mirage V jets were ready for delivery when the embargo was imposed (Evron 1970: 84).

The French embargo exposed the twin problem faced by Israel, namely, limited options for arms imports and unreliable suppliers. France had provided a cushion for its military requirements for a decade, which partly resulted in Israel overcoming its difficulties in procuring weapons from the US and overcoming the consequences of the Soviet supplies to the Arab countries. The flow of French technology resulted in Israel undertaking limited quantities of repairs, upgrading and local production in the field of aeronautics, radar, missiles, electro-communication systems, rockets (Crosbie 1974: 152-169). The development of Fouga-Magister trainer jet was one important project where both the countries benefitted from their collaboration (Bloch 2004: 1-33). By 1960, they reached the stage where joint design and testing of missiles began (Reiser 1989: 41). The embargo came when the domestic defence industries were showing signs of maturity due to the French cooperation. The swiftness of de Gaulle’s move within hours after the outbreak of the June war exposed the problems of external reliance especially during war times.



At the same time, the embargo resulted in Israel facing up to the reality and seeking a long-term solution for its problem of arms procurement. Importance was given to the production of military items which were considered critical but could not be imported.

Writing on this subject, Steinberg observes,

The goal of indigenous arms production was also supported by Zionist ideology. Self-reliance, self-defence and independence were the principal ideological forces which supported the establishment of the Jewish state. Following independence, the themes of self-emancipation and the “liberation of Jews from the dependence of Gentiles” found expression in the growth of the military establishment and the creation of a local arms industry (Steinberg 1986: 164).

Following the 1967 embargo, military items including electronic systems, advanced aircrafts, tactical and strategic missiles, subsystems and small arms were produced.

Although the French embargo affected Israel’s arms imports, it did not hamper the production capacity of its defence industries. This was indicated by the development of major platforms such as Merkava tank, Nesher jet—the Israeli version of Mirage—Kfir jet and a variety of electronics and communication systems. Thus, though some basic framework was available since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the French embargo which spurred and accelerated the growth of Israeli defence industries and led to arms exports. The primary reason behind the establishment of these industries was to meet urgent security needs, but in the words of Sharon Sadeh, “A highly capable industry, which has been regarded as a model of Israeli technological achievements and self reliance, it is also a sector riven with structural discrepancies and conflict of interests” (Sadeh 2001). The section below highlights the evolution of a few major private and public-owned defence industries and their contribution to arms exports.

*a. Israel Military Industries (IMI):*

One of the earliest defence industries is the IMI, or Ta’as in Hebrew, and it is state-owned and the second largest employer in the defence sector. It was the first firm to export its products when in 1954 it signed an agreement with the Dutch “whereby an Israeli order for artillery shells was partially covered by payment in cash with the balance in the form of Israeli-manufactured military products” (Klieman 1985: 19). This firm started to export some of the reconditioned weapons.

IMI's arms production depended on the operational requirements of the IDF. Its excellence in the development and production of small arms systems was mainly due to its experiences with the weapons supplied by Czechoslovakia during the period leading up to the 1948 War. Under the leadership of Major Uziel Gal, in 1949, the IMI began to work on submachine guns which could be used by all the branches of the IDF (Reiser 1989: 22). While undertaking such programmes, Gal experimented on 9-mm models and Soviet-made 7.62 mm sub-machine guns. Along with these weapons, further work on post-war ZK 4769 mm gun laid the base for the development of the 9mm Uzi sub-machine gun, which became one of the most popular products of IMI. Secret services of many countries, including those with whom Israel does not have formal relation have been using this. The advantage of the Uzi sub machine gun is described in the following words:

Battle-proven in environments ranging from snow to desert, the Uzi appeals to foreign armies because it is relatively inexpensive, lightweight, and can be fired full or semi-automatic from the hip or shoulder, and therefore, is equally adaptable by security police as well (Klieman 1985: 80).

In addition to manufacturing indigenous products and licensed items, this firm also produces ammunitions for several captured and refurbished Soviet-made tanks and guns (Kaul 1987: 946).

Over time, the IMI began to enhance its production capabilities in tank guns, air fuel tanks, artillery rockets and towed assault bridges. The changing dynamics of the wars with the hostile Arab states demanded improvement in the nature of weapons systems. From mere copying the systems imported before the establishment of state, the IMI began to upgrade the existing weapons in their arsenals to meet the demands of the IDF.

After the Uzi became one of the most sought-after weapons, in the 1960s the IMI came up with the Galil family of assault rifles. Derived from the Soviet-made AK47 rifles this was used by the armed forces of a number of countries. Gradually, the IMI ventured into rocket production and produced items such as Arrowhead Chetz tank shells, artillery shells, bomb carriers, grenades, and rocket propellants (Klieman 1985: 80). Other popular military items produced by IMI included 155 mm Howitzer and 290-mm medium artillery rocket launchers.

Owing to combat experience with the Arab armies, Israel gave immense importance to the development of anti-tank weapons systems. One of the earliest products of IMI was the B-300 (Kaul 1987: 846). As the demand for main battle tanks (MBTs) increased, during the 1950s and 1960s Israel started building the Merkava or Chariot tank that was designed, developed and manufactured by Masha (Renovation and Maintenance Centres of the IDF Logistics Branch) division of the IMI. In the late 1960s it initiated discussion with Britain for the possible purchase and co-production of Chieftain tanks. Israel's military industrial experts took part in the designing and "combat experience were incorporated and two development models were tested" (Steinberg 1986: 175). About 70 designs were made by persons associated with the programme (Hoyt 2007: 88) but the Arab pressure forced Britain to abandon the project.

In addition, the US refused to supply modern M-60 tanks while agreeing to sell obsolete M-48 models. The continuous curtailment of external source of military items and technology, particularly following the French arms embargo and the unilateral cancellation of the Chieftain project by the British Cabinet in 1969 had given birth to the Merkava. The main reasons behind the development and production of this particular system were obvious:

Various nations have always refused to sell new and modern tanks to Israel. With the exception of the M-60 tanks, sold to us by the United States in 1971, no new tank has ever been sold to Israel directly from the manufacturer. This situation compelled the IDF to face the problem of improving and refitting old tanks. It thus emerged that the curse of refusal to sell us new tanks bore a blessing in its wake: we were forced to set up an infrastructure for renovations and adaptation of tanks and to raise generations of ordnance men who are experts in tank technology (Mintz 1984: 118).

The development of Merkava marked the rising significance gained by the defence industries.

Prior to this, most of the tank-related programmes revolved around the development of infrastructure required for maintaining, servicing, refurbishing and modifying the imported tanks. The Merkava signified a considerable improvement in tank technology. According to Steinberg, "The low silhouette, engine location in the front of the tank and special armour have increased crew protection, while the laser range

finder, computerized fire-control and night-vision optics have increased accuracy” (Steinberg 1983: 175). A major emphasis was given to protecting the crew and the entire body or minimising the impact of fire or ammunition explosion, a common experience witnessed during the June and October Wars. The development indicated one of the innovation skills acquired by defence industries from late 1960 and early 1970s.

The effectiveness of this tank was seen during the 1982 Lebanon War when its variant Merkava 1 successfully engaged the Soviet-made T-72 tanks used by Syria. Further upgrade led to the installation of 1,050 horsepower (hp) and 1,200 hp in Merkava 2 and Merkava 3, respectively, and they were powered by a US-made engine (Steinberg 1986: 176). Merkava 4 entered full production in 2001 and its first battalion joined the IDF in 2004. More advanced armour protection gears, guns and electronics systems have been introduced and the IMI also developed and produced Blazer armour “which exploded outwards when hit by an incoming HEAT (high energy anti-tank) round”, and this system was retrofitted onto the M-60 and Centurion tanks (Ibid: 176).

After the success story of Merakava, IMI and Urdan Industries Ltd., the firm which produced several main components of the tank, jointly produced an upgraded version of the M-47 Patton tank called Rhino tank. The performance of this tank was similar to that of M-60 at a reduced cost and it was fitted with advanced diesel-run engine, M-68 105-mm gun and modern fire control system (Kaul 1987: 847, Klieman 1985: 84).

*b. Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI):*

The IAI was established in 1953 and was initially known as ‘Bedek’ or the Institute for the Reconditioning of Aircraft (Klieman 1984: 27). This is Israel’s largest state-owned military industry and the largest exporter of weapons systems. Similar to the IMI, its production activities got a boost after the arms embargo imposed by de Gaulle. As observed by Zeev Bonen, a former President of Rafael,

After the 1967 war, driven by De Gaulle embargo, Israel embraced an all out sufficient policy of trying to develop and produce all its defence needs including major platforms (aircraft, tanks and missile boat) and weapon system of all types. Within a few years the industry grew tremendously, supplying a large variety of high quality systems to the Israeli armed forces (Bonen 1994: 56).

As Israel faced problem in acquiring combat jets during the June War, indigenous production became utmost priority.

During the early period of 1950s, Israel's defence industries mostly focused on manufacture of small arms and ammunitions and on refurbishing the Soviet-origin weapons. Over a period of time, Bedek had transformed from aircraft maintenance workshop to that of a full-fledged specialised firm by producing sophisticated avionics, missiles and capabilities for jet trainers (Sadeh 2000).

Beginning from 1968, IAI has enjoyed the corporate status of being "government-owned and autonomously (company) controlled by the MoD. On its executive board sit representatives of the ministries of defence, finance, transport, commerce and industry" (Klieman 1985: 77). Another advantage enjoyed by it was its close cooperation with the IDF and the battle field experience of the latter facilitated improvements in various weapons programmes of the IAI.

Although the post-1967 period witnessed rapid expansion of aviation industry, Israel had begun manufacturing training aircraft during the late 1950s and 1960s. This coincided with the burgeoning of military ties with France. After the Suez Crisis in 1956, France signed an agreement with Israel on 24 July 1957 for the licensed production of Fouga Magister trainer jet (Bloch 2004: 5).

The decision to manufacture the Fouga in Israel was not received lightly. The IAF [Israeli Air Force] did want the aircraft since it was considered one of the best trainers available at the time. According to a retired Commander of the IAF there were not many alternatives, during the 1950s, when it came to jet training aircraft. It was also the only training aircraft with a tandem cockpit, as required by the IAF, which was available for Israel on the market (Ibid: 6).

There was resistance as many officials within the defence ministry preferred to buy such systems from abroad. However, under the insistence of Peres and Moshe Kashti, who was in charge of finance in the ministry, the decision went in favour of manufacturing by the Bedek Aviation and on 7 July 1960, the first Fouga, assembled with French help was delivered to the IAF.

Bedek was renamed Israel Aircraft Industries just a week prior to the delivery of the first Fouga. After a couple of years, IAI began to produce the same jet trainer with

parts exclusively manufactured within the country. The goal of Al Schwimmer, who founded the IAI, to produce not only regular planes but also jets became a reality. Thereafter, local production and subsequent designs began with military aircraft. During the late 1960s, civilian planes such Arava STOL (short take off and landing) and Westwinds, which also have military utility, were produced.

The Arava 202 version offered range performance and fuel efficiency; it is designed to deliver parachuted airborne assault troops and to provide casualty evacuation, cargo paradrop and motor conveyance as well as passenger transport. So, too, the Seascan maritime patrol plane derived from the Westwind executive jet is all-weather, long-range aircraft, deployed by the IDF and the armed forces of several other countries for marine reconnaissance, signal intelligence, antisubmarine warfare or even, depending on its configuration, as an air-to-sea missile platform (Klieman 1984: 28).

In some cases, these planes were also used in counterinsurgency operations.

The transformation in the military aviation sector came when France stopped the delivery of Mirage jets in the wake of June War., The supply of some parts and related technology continued until 1969 when a total embargo was put in place after the Israeli air strike on Beirut International Airport in January. On the other hand, the Soviet Union continued its supplies to Egypt and Syria and approximately 200 planes were delivered to Egypt and some of its older fighter jets were replaced by modern MiG-21s, Su-7s, and Tu-16s (Reiser 1989: 84-85). The growing security and political exigencies became quite apparent during this period and Israel had to face the ban on arms shipments and delays. Under these circumstances, the embargo gave further impetus to indigenisation of weapons systems, including major platforms such as fighter aircraft. The IAI took advantage of this reorientation and began with the production of Neshar, reverse engineered from the French Mirage (Steinberg 1986: 1967).

The combination of factors such as the need to maintain military edge over its adversaries, uncertainty of foreign supplier in times of war and domestic innovative skills finally paved the way to the development of combat jet, Kfir. The decision to build Kfir was facilitated by the experience gained by the IAI from its development of Neshar which used US-made J-79 jet engine (produced by the General Electric-GE), and a few imported electronic systems. The development of Kfir signified the

ability of the IAI to upgrade the existing systems and their designs with the help of locally produced components. The jet made its debut in early 1973 (Hoyt 2007: 89). In 1975, the aircraft was delivered to IAI and two years later, it participated in an air strike in Lebanon, and by the end of 1970s, there were enough Kfirs to replace the aging Mirage and Nesher aircrafts (Brun 2011, Klieman 1985: 78). With further R&D, IAI produced upgraded versions, namely, Kfir C-2 and C-3, suited for ground and aerial combat.

During the 1970s, Israel reached a position to manufacture military items on fairly economical basis and while a large volume was consumed by the IDF, surplus was exported. Under intense pressure from the IAI, in 1976, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin approved the export of Kfir but this ran into difficulties over the US veto as the aircraft had US-supplied engines. The Carter Administration, for instance, vetoed Ecuador's request and the role of the US factor is discussed in Chapter Five. Reflecting on this, Efraim Inbar noted:

Israel wanted to export Kfir to enable the IAI to benefit from the economies of scale. Yet, due to Israel's political isolation, Israeli items of high visibility, such as planes, did not appeal to many prospective clients in spite of the enticing price. Even another 'pariah' state, Taiwan, refused to buy the Kfir (Inbar 2008: 33).

With a change in the US foreign policy under Ronald Reagan, Israel exported this aircraft to Ecuador, Columbia, Sri Lanka.

After the success of Kfir, the IAI began to produce substantial parts useful for the US-made fighters such as the F-16 jet. This indicated the gradual technological advancement and marked the transformation in the types of weapons systems designed and developed by Israel's defence industries. Earlier most of the systems produced locally were either adapted or upgraded from the age-old Soviet systems. Owing to this change and due to the rising security threats from the Arab adversaries, Israel opted for a multipurpose or high-performance fighter aircraft called Lavi. After several initial resistances within the IDF, in February 1980 the Likud government under Prime Minister Menachem Begin approved the development of this jet.

Arguments in favour of Lavi project centred around the importance of maintaining a local capability for aircraft manufacture and economic impact of ending the program. Some went so far as to argue that

production of the platform itself was necessary to spur innovation in sub-systems and other technological niches (Hoyt 2007: 98).

This was one of the most ambitious projects of Israel, and IAI, in particular, but it resulted in complete failure due to various strategic and economic reasons. A high degree of financial and technological dependence on the US caused a major controversy and strained their ties and the issue is addressed in Chapter Five.

The IAI pursued various R&D programmes on naval warfare systems, missiles and remotely piloted vehicle (RPV), which later became unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). While nascent R&D activities began in the late 1940s, the performance of earliest products like Luz and Shafrir 1 missiles were not satisfactory. The former missile was particularly developed to face the Soviet-made surface-to-surface missile systems available to the Egyptian and Syrian armies. Following the June War, innovations began in missiles and electronic warfare systems and improved version, Shafrir 2, was produced by another firm called Rafael (which is highlighted below). Another incident that triggered the need for an advanced missile system was the sinking of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* in October 1967 by an Egyptian cruiser using a Soviet-made Styx ship-to-ship missile. An accelerated effort resulted in the development of Gabriel missile (Reiser 1989: 190). Gabriel-I, which was the first model of this missile family, had a range of 22 kilometres (km), while the Gabriel-II had a range of 40 kms. During the early 1980s, the Gabriel-III which could be operated in three different modes, namely fire-and-target, fire-and-control or fire update, was introduced (Steinberg 1986: 178).

Other naval products of the IAI included Barak missile and Dvora 71 patrol boat described as “a fast missile craft capable of serving as a long-range patrol boat, for harbour police and custom duties, armed escort or in-shore assault...”(Klieman 1984: 28). The Barak missile emerged as an important defensive mechanism particularly against incoming missiles and aircrafts. This was an advanced sea-skimming supersonic missile system and had significant buyers in several foreign countries.

From early 1980s, Israel started to give major emphasis towards the development of RPVs or UAVs, and “these weapons represent design innovation at the international state of the art and represent the most advanced stage of development in the area of



indigenous military production” (Steinberg 1986: 169). During this period, IAI’s product, SCOUT mini-RPV was considered as one of the most sophisticated available in the market. Apart from utility for military purposes such as reconnaissance, battlefield combat, and target identification, it had significant applications in coastal and waterway control or damage assessment (Klieman 1984: 29). This production received utmost attention due to its commendable service during the 1982 Lebanon War, so much so that “following their remarkable performance during the Lebanese invasion in the early 1980s, Israel enjoys a virtual monopoly in the global market of Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPV)” (Kumaraswamy: 1996b: 1527). Earlier, especially during the October War, the IDF used drones produced by the US.

As military conflicts increased, upgrade and innovations have been introduced in the field of this military production. Along with Tadiran, which is one of Israel’s leading electronic firms, IAI’s Malat division took up the task of producing several varieties of UAVs. The importance of UAVs in counter-terrorism is crucial:

Terrorism gave prominence to unmanned aerial vehicles because of their reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition capabilities. For example, since they can see at night, darkness no longer cloaks attacks by Hamas, Hizbollah, and other groups. In particular, the role of UAVs on the urban battlefield that terrorists prefer has become important. With aerial photography, these vehicles offer an effective way of finding snipers and generating street plans and relief maps of enemy positions. That information in turn can be relayed to commanders in real time. Unmanned vehicles have become a necessity before sending troops into a city (Sander 2002-03: 117).

These firms have also become successful in searching for solutions for new security challenges and hence several countries in Asia, Europe, North and South America began purchasing various types of UAVs. Some of the popular are Harpy-II or Harop, Heron, Searcher Hermes 450 and 900, Skylark (produced by Elbit Systems). Israel has become the world’s largest exporter of UAVs, and selling worth US\$4.6 billion worth of products between mid-2000s and 2013.

### *c. Rafael*

The third major defence industry, Rafael had carved a niche for itself in a different field and represents the core of the defence sector. It was founded in 1958 as one of the most important R&D institutions. With more than 5,000 employees it replaced the IDF Science Corps and its successor, the Division of Research and Planning (Mintz

1984: 115). Rafael is attached to the MoD and its speciality is in the research, design and development of new defence systems. It has been responsible for maintaining the qualitative superiority of the IDF. Owing to the sensitive nature of their working units, much of the activities carried out by this firm are kept away from public domain.

From the June War, Rafael's importance had increased tremendously as it produced some of the most sophisticated systems. Rafael has "been responsible for the development of over 100 different weapons systems for the IDF since 1967" (Hoyt 2007: 70). The firm had supplied the IDF with some advanced technologies, particularly in guided weaponry and electronic warfare, electro-optics and thermal imaging, missile detection and propulsion, and a score of other related areas (Klieman 1984: 31). During the late 1960s, it became a "closed economic unit", financed completely by development and production contracts (Hoyt 2007: 70). "During 1978-79, about half of RAFAEL's production budget was allocated for procurement of weapons subsystems from the other defence industries and from about 150 civilian plants, primarily those engaged in metalwork, mechanics, electronics and industrial chemistry" (Mintz 1984: 116). A few items developed by Rafael during its early stages included Shafrir 1, Shafrir 2 and Python 3 air-to-air missiles, a computer for firing control of artillery and other defence products (Ibid: 115). These items carry high export values.

Despite the non-availability of concrete details on the export values of Rafael, it was estimated that the company earned approximately US\$10 million in 1982 (Klieman 1984: 31). In 1983, it participated in the Paris Air Show, and displayed its combat-tested Python-III missiles; ship-defence anti-missiles, and surface-to-air systems.

As Rafael moved towards more advancement with its R&D programmes, it had begun to employ approximately 6,500 workers by 1986 and 70 of them were engaged in its R&D related activities while the rest were employed in productions (Hoyt 2007: 70). With such considerable manpower, it could design and develop several state-of-the-art defence equipments, particularly those items which were not available elsewhere. Due to such advancement, Israel gradually began to attract worldwide attention for its missile and anti-missile systems. As Hoyt explained,

The entire Israeli guided missile program was conceived and initiated at RAFAEL, which also designed the PYRAMID television-guided bomb and other precision-guided munitions. RAFAEL designed the TAL-2 cluster bomb to meet IAF requirements at a time when the US refused to supply these weapons (Ibid.).

While the success rate of Rafael was high during the 1980s, it had begun to see a decline in its workforce as the number of person employed dropped from 7,500 in 1986 to just 4,100 in 1999 (SIPRI 2000: 330). With such drastic decline, it had shifted its priorities from pure research and development to production and competition with other weapons producers within the country as well as abroad.

Besides these three major companies, there are a few more firms that also play an important role in developing and producing weapons systems. Mintz mentioned that “the Labor Federation sector accounts for about one-fourth of Israel’s total industrial output; exports reached some \$1.6 billion in 1982” (Mintz 1985b: 15). Koor, an industrial arm of Histadrut, is one of the largest conglomerates which have also helped in defence productions with the help of their subsidiaries. By the early 1980s, this firm had emerged as the fourth largest military exporter and by mid-1983; its export value was estimated at US\$231 million (Klieman 1985: 82). During this period, it had employed about 34,000 workers in 200 odd companies, such as subsidiary firm Tadiran, Soltam and Telrad. (Mintz 1985b: 16).

#### *d. Electronic Warfare Systems*

Apart from the conventional defence industries, there are a large number of firms which play important role by producing a wide range of electronic warfare systems (EWS) such as radar communications, reconnaissance, jamming, avionics, optics and missile guidance equipments (Reiser 1989: 186). In these areas, they have succeeded in achieving a considerable technological autonomy.

In this regard, IAI’s electronic division is impressive. A few of the earliest divisions under this mega industry included ELTA Electronics Ltd, MBT Weapons Systems-IAI, MLM System Engineering and Integration, and TAMAM Precision Instrument Industries-IAI (Kaul 1987: 842). Their specialisations were in navigational and fire-control systems as well as electronic warfare solutions. The section below briefly

highlights briefly the features of some of the firms and their contributions to defence industries.

i. Tadiran:

Tadiran is considered to be the leading firm that provides the IDF with advanced electronics and communications equipment and is next only to IAI in terms of arms exports. Its overseas trade in 1982 stood between US\$157 million and US\$180 million, while these figures notched up to US\$194 million in 1983 (Klieman 1985: 83-83). By 1984, out of its total business worth US\$600 million, Tadiran exported approximately US\$245 million, or 40 percent of the entire business. Such jump in its productions was enabled by its smaller factories and plants which had specialised in manufacturing radio and air conditioners. Military items produced by Tadiran included intelligence-gathering and electronic warfare techniques, the Mastiff drone, night-sensing devices and tank rangefinders, and HF-700 series of military radio set (Klieman 1985: 83). South Africa, which is one of the case studies of this research, purchased items produced by Tadiran, and according to Esther Howard, "In 1970 Tadiran negotiated a licensing arrangement with C.F. Fuchs Ltd. of South Africa for the production of certain highly sophisticated electronics equipment developed by the Israeli firm" (Howard 1983b). While Tadiran did fairly well till mid-1980s when its military sales reached 60 percent of total sales, it began to decline to 45 percent, and the firm suffered severely during the late 1980s. It had to downsize its workforce by 50 percent (Kumaraswamy 1996b: 1523-154).

ii. Elisra:

It is a subsidiary firm of Tadiran known for producing electronic warfare equipments. Over a period of time this firm became a major supplier of early warning equipments for the IDF and one was one of the few defence industries which employed more than 1,000 persons. In the 1980s, its sales to the IDF accounted for about 43 percent of total sales (Hoyt 2007: 72). In 1983 it was awarded the coveted Israel Defence Prize for its remarkable contributions to Israeli navy and air force. As most of the firms are closely linked with one another, Elisra also cooperated with bigger industries such as IAI and IMI.

During the 1980s, most of Elisra's items were exported to North American and European countries and its airborne systems included SPS-2000, a self-protection

system designed for front-line aircraft such as F-15 and F-16; SPS-1000, designed specifically for the aircraft upgrade market and SPS-600 for helicopters and low-flying aircrafts. It also produced a variety of ELINT or Electronic Intelligence systems as well as ESM/ECM systems for Israel's new Sa'ar 5 corvette and other vessels of the navy (Ibid.). In the 1990s, Elisra's presence could be seen as far as in East Asian countries such as Singapore where it was involved in the modernisation of avionics of the latter's F-5 combat planes by integrating early warning suites (Kogan 1995). Both elements of Tadiran and Elisra had come together in 1999 to create powerful electronics conglomerate with an export of over US\$300 million. The newly created Elisra Group consisted of Elisra Electronic Systems, Tadiran Spectralink, Tadiran Electronic Systems, BVR Systems Ltd., and Stellar (Hoyt 2007: 72). As with Tadiran, IAI also has its own subsidiary firm by the name Elta Electronics Industries which produces electronic warning and radar systems. By mid 1980s, it employed about 1,800 workers. This firm had seen significant export values. In 1977, it exported items worth about US\$7 million while the value increased to US\$25 million on 1983.

In Israel, private-owned defence firms have also played important roles in promoting arms exports and El-Op (Electro Optics) and Elbit Systems are two of the most successful private defence firms. Weapons systems from these industries are sold in Northern American countries, European Union (EU) nations, and in different countries in Asia.

iii. *Elbit*:

Elbit was established in 1966 with the main objective of providing the IDF with advanced computer-driven equipments. During its early days, the IDF was the major consumer of its products and later it went on to compete with other defence firms in the international market. As it happened with other defence industries, this firm had faced the defence cutbacks during the 1980s but it withstood the crisis. A scholar pointed out that "Military sales account for approximately half of Elbit sales (\$300 million in 1991), and about two thirds of the company's net profits" (Ibid: 73). This firm had been able to survive during the recession due to its remarkable capabilities in upgrading various defence products for all the three sectors, namely, sea, air, and land

systems. The US military has remained one of the largest markets for Elbit, accounting for about 45 to 50 percent of sales, and followed by the IDF.

Important projects carried out by Elbit included:

Phantom upgrade programme for the IAF and the central mission computer for IAF F-16s. Elbit performs upgrade work for the aircraft of several foreign countries, including Northrop F-5s, MiG-21s, and the Czech L-39 trainer. Elbit provides the fire control system for the Merkava tank, integrates similar systems into both Western and Soviet-bloc equipment, produces a range of artillery fire control systems. The company has also developed command and control, ESM, and ELINT equipment for naval vessel, and is one of the few manufacturers in the world fully integrated ELINT/ESM systems for submarines (Ibid.).

The upgraded version of Kfir such as C7 was equipped with Elbit System 82 weapon delivery and navigation systems (WDNS).

iv. *El-Op*:

Amongst the private industries, Electro-Optics Industries Ltd or El-Op is another leading firm which specialises in computer technology and electronic warfare devices and is partly owned by Tadiran. Its specialisation are night vision equipments; thermal imaging systems; laser range finding; laser communications; tank periscope for commander, driver and gunner; computerised fire control systems; avionic instrumentation; bore-sights and intrusion detection systems (Klieman 1985: 84). Most of these items were exported. The US military, along with the IDF, have remained two of its biggest customers. For example, the US Apache attack helicopters used electronic and electro-optic subsystems produced by El-Op, and that of the Rangefinder Target Designator Laser for Cobra helicopters (Hoyt 2007: 72).

v. *RADA*

This is one of the smaller private-owned firms which specialises in computers, automatic test equipments and ground support systems. It is also involved in the maintenance and upgrade programmes for the aircrafts of numerous foreign countries. Two important products of this firm are Automatic Test Equipment (ATE) and Data Transfer Equipment (DTE), designed for the F-16s, and later used on F-5s and Mirage aircrafts. While ATE can be used as substitute for “multiple highly trained technicians, DTE is used in transferring “mission data from electronic cartridges to avionics computers, and process information much more rapidly than the original US

systems” (Ibid:73). The efficiency of the aircraft during combat operations is enhanced with the use of these systems, and they help in simplifying the related analysis after the mission ends. Israel’s aviation sector makes significant use of components produced by it.

Against the backdrop of these defence industries, the following section explains the factors why Israel began its arms sales to forge foreign relations.

#### As a Foreign Policy Tool

Even after Israel established several defence industries, it remained concerned over the continuous supply of advanced weapons systems to the Arab states by the Soviet Union. This increased the demands from the IDF, often resulting in surplus production. Both to meet rising cost of productions and manage its surplus stock, Israel began to look out for markets. Furthermore, hard currencies earned from overseas sales were utilised for indigenisation. The size of the domestic Israeli market was a major concern. Weapons produced by major manufacturers like the US and Soviet Union were consumed internally; such as the aircrafts manufactured by the US firm McDonnell Douglas being consumed by the United States Air Force (USAF) and other branches of the armed forces. Between 1970 and 1979, the volume of the American domestic sale was estimated at US\$20 billion or 62 percent of the total corporate sales (Adams 1989: 342).

Thus, limited domestic market, costs of R&D and surplus capability made arms exports viable and necessary aspect of the Israeli defence industries.

Naturally, pressure by the military in support of indigenous military industries and for newer systems development, both of which necessitate huge public investment capital, become easier once overseas defence sales are seen to show both a nice return as well as secondary benefits for Israel’s external relations (Klieman 1984: 19).

While economic considerations were importance for arms exports, there were significant political considerations which resulted in various Israeli governments encouraging the arms trade.

Historically arms sales have been strategic as well as commercial and this was more clearly manifested in the pattern of arms supplies during the Cold War. Driven by ideological rivalry both Superpowers armed their allies and clients both to increase

military capabilities and to signal closer ties with the respective patrons. In some cases, arms were supplied as aid or at 'friendly prices.' Until the end of the Cold War, Cuba benefitted from its closer political ties with the Soviet Union (Tsokhas 1980). Until the Sino-Soviet rift (1960-1989), China benefitted from its ideological proximity with Moscow. Since the early 1970s, countries like North Korea, North Vietnam and Pakistan benefitted from their closer ties with China and received large quantities of weapons (Bitzinger 1992b). Likewise, countries like South Korea, South Vietnam, Turkey and other allies benefited militarily from their close proximity with the US. The strategic ties with the US resulted in Pakistan receiving approximately US\$7.6 billion worth of military aid and assistance during the Cold War (Ali 2009: 254). In most of the cases, arms supplies also included latest version of the inventories which were not exported to other states. Indeed, close political ties between the Superpowers and other countries came to be recognised and identified only by the level of sophisticated weapons that the latter were able to obtain. In the case of Israel's arms export, one could notice a few interesting peculiarities.

#### Political Isolation

Non-recognition, exclusion from regional groupings, periodic condemnations in multilateral forums and non-invitation to various Afro-Asian gatherings have been the hallmarks of Israel's foreign policy challenges since 1948. Its exclusion from the Bandung Conference of April 1955 formalised its exclusion from the emerging of Non-aligned Movement (NAM) which was formalised in 1961. As defence industries were gaining experience and expanding, Israel was increasingly facing political isolation, especially in the Third World. The military success during the June War ironically marked greater political isolation of Israel, especially in the UN.

The 1967 Six Day War and its political aftermath dramatized as never before the role of the Third World in Israel's foreign relations. Even though Israeli armed might had secured her borders and reopened the route to Africa and the Far East in six days, the ensuing political battle raged for many months in the United Nations (Laufer 1972: 624).

Until then Israel enjoyed some support from the Third World countries in international forum manifested through their abstention. Two resolutions presented at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1967 by the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia respectively condemning Israel's military aggression during the June War were unsuccessful due to lack of support from African states (Ibid: 625).



However, there was a gradual shift in the late 1960s, especially in wake of the October War and the resultant oil crisis. The fire in the Al-Aqsa mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem in August 1969 sparked uproar among Muslims world over and spurred Saudi Arabia and Morocco to organize the first Islamic summit conference in Rabat the following month. The emergence of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), renamed as Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in June 2011, marked a new phase in Israel's political fortune. Unlike the Arab League, OIC was global in its reach and came to affect policies of even those countries where Muslims are a significant minority.

The joint communiqué of the Summit represents the consensus of the Muslim world as it pledged full support for liberation of Palestine, demanding the restoration of Jerusalem as well as the occupied Arab territory to the pre-June 1967 status. The Conference, however, did not call upon the participating States to resort to diplomatic and economic boycott of Israel (Akhtar 1969: 340).

From 25 countries as its founding members, the OIC has emerged as one of the largest groupings in the world and began influencing the direction and position of various countries and their policies towards Israel. As the largest bloc within NAM, it began to escalate the anti-Israeli rhetoric of the Movement. As a result, during the 1970 UNGA session, Israel witnessed a radical shift in the positions of its erstwhile friends in Africa and Latin America.

Condemnation of Israel and its policies towards the Palestinians became the highlights of most NAM gatherings and the movement has been demanding and hailing the political isolation of Israel. The Third NAM summit in Lusaka adopted a resolution that

... welcomes the decision of certain member countries to break off relations with Israel, and requests the other member countries to take steps to boycott Israel diplomatically, economically, militarily and culturally, as well in the field of sea and air transport, in accordance with the provisions of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter (Resolution on the Middle East Situation and the Palestine Issue 1973).

This eventually culminated in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) being granted the Status of an Observer in the UN in 1974. Meanwhile, the oil crisis of 1973 further weakened Israel's political fortunes in Africa as well as Latin America. The efforts to condemn Israel at the UN were supported by the Organisation of African

Unity (OAU) which began to link Israel's policies to South Africa. On 14 December 1973, weeks after the October War, for the first time Zionism was associated with *apartheid* in South Africa through a UNGA Resolution condemning "the unholy alliance between Portuguese colonialism, South African racism, Zionism and Israeli imperialism" (United Nations General Assembly 1973: 33).

The rhetoric against Israel culminated in the infamous 10 November 1975, the UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 (XXX) that declared that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination" (United Nations General Assembly 1975: 84). The resolution was adopted with 72 votes in favour, 35 against with 32 abstentions. Lamenting this Bernard Lewis observed:

Zionism is basically not a racial movement but a form of nationalism or, to use the current nomenclature, a national liberation movement. Like other such movements, it combines various currents, some springing from tradition and necessity, others carried on the winds of international change and fashion... In its political form, Zionism is quite clearly a nationalist movement of the type which was common in parts of Europe in the nineteenth century and which spread to much of Asia and Africa in the twentieth century. It is no more racial and no more discriminatory than other movements of this type- indeed less than most, since it is based on an entity defined primarily in religious rather than ethnic terms (Lewis 1976: 55).

The continuous unfolding of these events between early and mid-1970s curbed Israel's political leverage to forge better relations in different parts of the world.

Its dwindling international political fortunes affected Israel in three distinct manners. One, since the late 1960s, the process of decolonisation worked against Israel as the newly independent countries became unfriendly and even hostile towards the Jewish state from the very beginning. Two, until mid-1960s Israel was able to win over the political support of and recognition from a number of countries. From about 16 countries which recognised it in the 1950s, the number moved to 25 in the mid-1960s. This process of normalisation came to an abrupt end after the June war as Israel was unable to secure recognition or normalisation of relations with any of the countries from Sub-Saharan Africa. Three, the most important consequence of the isolation was the reversal of its political fortunes vis-à-vis countries with which Israel had close political and even military relations. A number of countries which benefitted from Israel reversed their policies, terminated their relations, withdrew their ambassadors

or closed down Israeli missions in their countries. This process which began in the wake of the June war was accelerated after the oil crisis and resultant Arab oil wealth. Thus, between 1967 and 1973, 37 countries broke off relations and between 1974 and 1975, two countries followed suit. Indeed, out of 72 countries, which voted in favour of Zionism being branded racist in the UN, as many as 29 had relations with Israel in the 1960s and 1970s. Even European countries with which it had closer ties in the past began to change and some of key countries like France (since 1967) and Britain (since 1973) began adopting positions that were distinctly unfriendly and hostile towards Israel. Thus, since late 1960s Israel witnessed halt, freeze and reversal of its diplomatic fortunes in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The growing political isolation was a reflection of the limited economic leverages available to Israel since 1948. It is not endowed with any strategic natural resources like oil and often suffered from water shortage. Large quantities of its basic requirements have to be imported and until the mid-1990s it depended heavily upon the economic aid from the US to meet its normal requirements. Between 1949 and 1996, for example, it received US\$23.1 billion from the US in the form of economic aid and US\$29 billion as military aid (Zanotti 2015:35). Thus, not only it lacks economic resources to help other countries, it had a high degree to economic dependence upon the US.

In addition, the oil crisis resulted in enormous economic gains for the oil producing Arab countries such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This resulted in a corresponding increase in their political influence and they came to influence the policies of a number of European countries towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. The emergence of PLO in the international arenas and the international recognition of the political rights of the Palestinians could directly be linked to Arab politico-economic influence after 1973. The UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 242 adopted on 22 November 1967, for example, described the Palestinian question merely as a 'refugee' issue but this changed after 1973 when the right of self-determination of the Palestinians were recognised.

Thus, growing politico-diplomatic isolation and lack of other political or economic leverages compelled Israel to look to arms trade as an extension of its foreign policy.

Arms sales appeared feasible as well as inevitable means of diplomacy and “came to be employed more directly in attempts at breaching the wall of Arab hostility politically” (Klieman 1985: 20). Despite internal political divisions, Israel’s foreign policy had four major objectives:

1. To repel hostile attacks and guarantee defence of the state.
2. To gather as many of the dispersed Jewish people as possible in their ancient homeland.
3. To secure Israel’s place in an inhospitable environment and, to whatever extent possible, to alter that environment from a condition of enmity to one of amity.
4. To offset the country’s immediate Middle Eastern isolation by a worldwide network of mutually beneficial cultural, commercial and diplomatic ties (Klieman 1984: 17).

In order to meet these goals, a major emphasis was given on building relations by providing various types of military assistances and this went beyond mere economic calculations.

#### Patterns of Arms Trade

As Israel’s defence indigenisation programmes gained considerable momentum from the late 1960s, a definite pattern of arms trade began to be witnessed at later stages. Depending on the nature of its relations with a particular client, different kinds of military assistance beyond arms sales are provided by Israel. In some cases, the military ties are heavily concentrated on buyer-seller relationship, while there are others where co-production ventures, counterterrorism, and intelligence sharing cooperation became the salient features. Such pattern of the trade is discussed in the following section.

##### *a. Arms Sales:*

Israel’s Arms trade was not restricted only to the exports of finished products but it also included various other assistance and services. Arms sales began on a humble note as the defence industries did not produce any major weapons systems during the early and mid-1950s. Most of the weapons used by the IDF were imported, and many of them became obsolete over a period of time. Such weapons systems which were no longer needed by the IDF were sold, and the currencies earned were used by the domestic industries for their arms production programmes. This was visible during the mid-1950s when the IMI exported some of its own products and reconditioned weapons abroad after opening its production lines. Items sold to country like Burma

included Spitfire and reconditioned rifles (Klieman 1984: 10). During this period, several Latin American countries were customers, and were sold weapons mainly for economic motives. The urgency to earn foreign exchange to support its newly-developed defence industries had resulted in Israel selling its obsolete weapons. For example, in 1959, Sri Lanka purchased two British-made frigates which were considered obsolete by the Israeli navy (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 33). Likewise, there were other clients such as Zaire and Uganda which purchased obsolete M-4 Sherman tanks.

The Soviet-origin weapons captured during the wars with the Arab states constituted other important export items. As early as in 1956, the weapons of the Egyptian troops were captured after they fled from the Sinai and this became a source for surplus weapons. Items included a large quantity of guns, artillery, armoured vehicles, ammunition and several war-related materials (JTA 1956b). Through such activities, Israel acquired the skill to recondition or refurbish old weapons systems, and this went in its arms exports. As mentioned by a scholar, “What is established fact is that Israel has had possession of advanced arms from both sides and that it has successfully introduced modifications in these systems before putting them up for resale on the international market” (Steinberg 1986: 124). Therefore, arms trade grew slowly by exporting the obsolete and surplus stocks.

Although arms trade began from mid-1950s, a visible growth could be witnessed from the late 1960s due to rapid defence indigenisation process. Israel gradually possessed the required skills not only to develop and manufacture its own items, but perform upgrade on several old Soviet-era military equipments. These factors contributed to the rising volume of arms exports. The figure of its arms sales abroad increased from US\$12 million in 1956 to US\$15 million in 1966, and reached approximately US\$30 million in 1967 (Reiser 1989: 67). During this period, the Sub-Saharan African countries became some of the most important defence markets for Israel, with the IAI penetrating into this region with its varied products and military assistance such as training programmes.

While the June War sowed the seed for the deterioration of Israel’s diplomatic ties with most of the Sub-Saharan African countries, there was a constantly ongoing arms

trade between them till the October War and the oil crisis. Most of the weapons systems either produced locally or adapted became popular items in several countries, including in Asia and Latin America. Moreover, with South Africa emerging as one of the most important clients, the figure for arms export went up from US\$14 million in 1968 to US\$70 million in 1973. A popular military product was the Gabriel missile and IAI's export of this item in 1971 alone accounted for US\$38 million (Ibid: 111). After the October War, arms sales reached their peak, with the "War represents something of a turning point in the transformation of arms sales diplomacy from a peripheral or secondary position to one of greater centrality" (Klieman 1985: 23). This was the time when Israeli defence industries began producing sophisticated weapons systems, as indicated earlier in this chapter. The overall value of arms exports increased from US\$50 million in 1975 to US\$140 million in 1976, and reached approximately US\$250 million to US\$300 million by 1979. The considerable export of arms during this period was necessitated by its political downfall in the international standing, its need to counter the pressures exerted by the Arab countries, impact of the oil embargo, and its urgency to attain higher degree of self-sufficiency, both in stockpiling and manufacturing capabilities.

By the late 1970s, Israel found itself amongst the major weapons producers and exporters of the world. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between 1970 and 1979, it was the largest Third World arms exporter with a value estimated at US\$447 million, and identified South Africa, Argentina and El Salvador as its biggest importers (SIPRI 1980: 84). As a sign of progression, by 1980, it was the eleventh largest major weapons exporting country in the world (SIPRI 1981: 194). **Table 2-3** indicates figures of Israel's arms deliveries to different regions and **Table 2-4** gives the export figures of the top five weapons exporting countries and Israel.

Due to the subsequent revision of figures for all the years, the ranking and data given below for arms exporters may differ from those published by the SIPRI earlier.

**Table 2-3: Israel's Arms Deliveries, 1986-1990 (in US\$ million).**

Recipients	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1986-1990
Third World	261	267	111	241	31	912
Industrialised World	8	73	16	78	8	182
To all countries	269	340	127	318	39	1,094

Source: SIPRI 1991: 198.

This analysis would be incomplete without mentioning Israel's transfers of its technologies for foreign platforms as a part of its arms transfer programmes. Arms clients benefited from various military technologies developed by its defence firms. The sale of Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to India, equipped on Russian-built Ilyushin Il-76s, in May 2009 and March 2010, at a cost of US\$1.1 billion is a good example (NDTV 2009 and TO1 2010). In addition to the three operational AWACS, two more are expected to join the Indian Air Force (Sen 2015). While, in 2000, smaller firms like ELTA won tender to supply the South Korean national maritime police force with its ELM-2022 advanced naval patrol radar, and Elisra offered electronic warfare systems for 400 helicopters for its air force in 2001 (Marom 2001). In October 2013, Elbit Systems bagged similar contract to equip Surion helicopter (of Republic of Korea Army) with its advanced Helmet Mounted Display (HMD) (Globes 2013). Missiles are also being transferred to foreign clients. In September 2014, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) of India cleared the deal for the acquisition of 262 Barak-I anti-missile defence (AMD) systems for its navy warships (Pandit 2014).

**Table 2-4: Conventional Weapons Deliveries by Top Five Countries and Israel, 1996-2000**

Rank	Supplier	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	1996-2000
1	USA	9,160	11,278	12,970	1,0374	5,489	49,271
2	Russia	3,309	2,624	1,595	3,719	4,443	15,690
3	France	1,833	3,099	3,374	1,450	1,040	10,792
4	United Kingdom	1,477	2,433	1,037	1,044	1,035	7,026
5	Germany	1,418	565	1,201	1,228	1,235	5,647
6	Israel*	200	201	136	115	212	864

\*Israel was the 12<sup>th</sup> largest supplier of arms during the period 1996-2000.

**Source:** SIPRI 2001: 357

Indigenously developed weapons systems are an important component of arms exports. With the rapid growth of defence indigenisation programmes following the 1967 French embargo, Israel's defence industries started to give a major emphasis to the development and manufacture of major systems such as Merkava tanks and fighters jets, along with a range of missiles, anti-missile systems, and electronic warfare systems (Steinberg 1986: 173-191). Kfir fighter jet became one of the most sought-after locally produced items, and countries such as Sri Lanka, Columbia, and Ecuador purchased it during the early and mid-1990s (Abadi 2004: 304, Eshel 2014). However, owing to the imports of engine components and electronic systems, this jet has not been considered as "entirely indigenous", but the "ability to upgrade existing designs through local integration of wholly independent components is an important addition to local production capabilities" (Steinberg 1986: 168).

Prior to the development of this jet, Neshar, a modified version of Mirage-III and Mirage-V, was sold to Ecuador and Argentina (Pfeffer 2014). Its manufacturer IAI is increasingly targeting the Asia-Pacific countries. Philippines, which is a potential market for Israeli defence products, is likely to purchase a new variant, Kfir Block 60, which is estimated at US\$20 million per unit (Eshel 2014). This is an upgraded



version with the “Introduction of IAI/ELTA EL/M 20152 active, electronically scanned array (AESA) radar, extending the fighter jet’s capabilities to conduct maritime strike missions and extended air defence, through the networked integration of on-board and off-board sensors” (Eshel 2014). Other domestically produced items which are of high export value include Galil rifles, Tavor assault rifles, Python and Popeye missiles and anti-missile systems such as Barak, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) such as Spike NLOS (No Line of Sight), manufactured by Rafael, UAVs (Heron, Searcher, Hermes) and various electro-communication systems. Along with a few European Union (EU) and Latin American countries (including Brazil), India, South Korea and Vietnam are some of the lucrative defence markets (Kumaraswamy 1998b, Kumaraswamy 2009, Bitzinger 2013, Skopich 2010).

*b. Upgrading*

Another factor which enhanced Israel’s credibility as an important arms exporter is its skills in upgrading existing as well as outdated military items, mainly Soviet origin equipments. With this, it “had developed the know-how and has managed to capture unilaterally a large share of the market for the upgrade of ex-Soviet equipment” (Antonenko 2002: 89). Several technicians succeeded in servicing, reconditioning and enhancement of Western-origin military items such as the Patton and Centurion tanks. The latter tank was upgraded with 105 mm gun as well as fire-control system along with laser-range finder, all manufactured within the country. It had an advantage as many of its immigrants had already worked as engineers and technicians in the Soviet military industry (Inbar 2009a: 237). When the old systems were reconverted and upgraded, their life span became lengthened and this made the purchase worthwhile. As a result, the choice for replacement of aging systems remained a less preferred option. As mentioned by a scholar, “To poor but defence conscious countries, such hybrid systems suit their needs better than being forced to buy a newer but more expensive system” (Klieman 1985: 124).

Major defence industries such as IAI, IMI and Elbit Systems continue to carry out various upgrading programmes for their arsenals as well as for foreign clients. For example, IAI upgraded approximately 15 Mirage- VS for the Colombian air force. The IDF’s battlefield experiences from the Soviet-made weapons systems captured from the Arab countries, particularly during the June War gave the skills to further

modernise those systems. Moreover, exposure to the weapons supplied by Western powers such as the US further enhanced the capabilities to undergo upgrading programmes. For instance, upgrades were conducted on the US-made fighter jets such as F-16s and Patriot Air and Missile Defence System. This missile system was installed with more advanced radar systems to provide the IDF with warnings of any incoming missiles (Ha'aretz 2010). These upgrades were also done on the equipments of many of its clients.

Israel confronted the hostile Arab states, which were equipped with Soviet-supplied weapons such tanks and MiG fighters, with the equipments supplied by the US, including A-4 Skyhawk aircraft and M48 Patton tanks. However, as it could capture a wide range of arms and ammunitions from its enemies since the 1948 War, innovations and programmes on upgrades were given utmost importance. A few of the military items captured during the June War included artillery pieces, mortar rounds, mines, hand grenades and ammunition (Taubman 1983). Upgrades on major platforms such as MiGs, which were considered as the most-advanced jet, could not be conducted as Israel did not have this particular fighter jet. Under such circumstances, acquiring a fully functional MiG fighter jet became a primary goal of its security intelligence establishments, and Mossad started an operation called *Operation Diamond* in mid-1963 (CIE 1966). On 16 August 1966, Iraqi fighter pilot Munir Redfa defected to Israel with his MiG-21 jet (IDF 2011). After this successful mission, Israel and the US started to study the design of the plane, and acquired the knowledge to undergo further retrofitting or upgrade. Further, experts analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the MiG and trained their pilots accordingly (Norton 2004: 382). The upgrades on Soviet-made military hardware continued, and a major development took place in 1982 when a large cache of arms and ammunitions were obtained during the *Operation Peace for Galilee* in the Bekaa Valley from the Syrian and Palestinian forces. Items seized during this operation included T-34, T-55 and T-62 tanks, over 1.320 vehicles, 30,000-odd AK-47 rifles, submachine guns, light arms, approximately 200 anti-aircraft pieces and, several hand grenades, mortar rounds and artillery shells (Klieman 1985: 124). These items underwent refurbishment programmes and were put up for sale.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia became buyer of upgraded military equipments (Bahbah and Butler 1986, Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 21-135). This favoured Israel's arms exports activities because many of its clients from these regions could not afford first-hand or new weapons. Thus, the retrofitting or upgrading activities on the US and the Soviet Union-origin weapons became another advantage for the defence industries. As Klieman aptly describes, "Israel may be the only country in the world with so mixed an inventory on the basis of point of origin and also the only country in the world that develops defence for both Western and Soviet weapons systems" (Klieman 1985: 124). Several aging Soviet-made weapons of its clients are also overhauled, refurbished and upgraded. Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, which rely mostly on Soviet-origin arms and ammunitions, are likely to receive such military assistance from Israel for "its technological capabilities, advanced air defence systems" as a part of their evolving military cooperation (Azulai 2012). Likewise, India turned towards Israeli companies for retrofitting some of its aging military equipments.

Due to fast changing battlefield experiences, improvisations are being made on locally manufactured Merkava tanks. The need for an upgrade was felt after the action against the Syrian armed forces during the 1982 Lebanon War. While export of this weapon system is almost nil till date, Israeli experts performed routine upgrades on various tanks for its clients such as Turkey (during early and late 2000s) and Argentina in 2015 at a cost of US\$111 million (Barzilai 2001, Fendel 2010 and Guevara 2015). Apart from this, in June 2012, Elbit Systems won a US\$62 million contract to upgrade C-130 transport aircraft of the Korean Air Force (*IsraelDefense* 2012). Under this upgrade contract, the existing analogue cockpit of the aircraft would be converted into a Glass Cockpit using its advanced digital display systems (Globes 2012). During the 1990s, Elta won a multi-million dollar contract to upgrade the avionics of platforms such as MiG-21 fighters (Minnick 2009b; Minnick 2009a).

### *c. Military Training*

Military training and assistance programmes are an integral part of Israel's ties with its partners. Beyond selling weapons systems, it helped a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America in setting up their air force, navy and training centres. The presence of direct military rules or strong leaders in these regions

facilitated the military cooperation with Israel, and made the latter's arms sales a profitable business. These services were used as a tool to forge better relations. In the words of Klieman,

Supplying military hardware... represents only one of the three forms which Israeli defence assistance presently takes. The second form is of a more advisory and technical nature. The distinction is that in contrast to the direct provision of arms, Israel goes beyond the mere transfer of weapons and aids to others to better utilize, operate, and maintain their own military arsenals, which may or may not feature Israeli weapons. This type of assistance often goes under such euphemisms as the "transfer of skills and erection of service infrastructures" and encompasses a number of defence-related projects and activities, for example, the training of local personnel in the operation and maintenance of weapons systems familiar to, or furnished by, Israel (Klieman 1985: 127).

Almost all the Latin American arms clients, a few Sub-Saharan African and Asian countries received such assistance in building up their militaries (Beit-Hallahmi 1987, Peters 1992, Abadi 2004). For example, Israel provided military advisors to Ecuadoran armed forces, and was involved heavily with its air force. Training lessons were given on various conventional warfare and counterinsurgency operations.

Israel helped Ghana in setting up its navy, flying school and training academy for army officers. During the early 1960 and mid-1960s, it was instrumental in giving trainings to African pilots (particularly Ghanaian, Ugandan, Tanzanian and Kenyan), army and police officers (Peters 1992: 7, Carol 2012: 181). General of Congolese Army Mobutu Sese Seko (later President of Zaire) and Idi Amin (later President of Uganda) received these benefits from Israeli military experts. Chapter Four highlights this aspect of military assistance provided to South Africa, and countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Zaire.

The Asian and Latin American countries with which Israel forged cooperation from 1950s and 1970s were no exception in getting military-related assistance. There was intense cooperation between the respective secret services as well. In Asia, Singapore is one of the first countries which received a significant help in setting up its army as well as the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (Abadi 2004: 172, 178, Cohen 2015). Writing on their cooperation, Jacob Abadi commented:

Lee continued to rely on Israeli military advisers and instructors. Appreciating the importance of having to maintain friendly ties with a

country situated in a predominantly Muslim region, close to Malaysia, Indonesia and strategically located Straits of Malacca, the Israelis responded with alacrity and expressed willingness to assist the Singaporean army and train its personnel (Abadi 2004: 177-178).

Their relationship was so intensive that Singapore was chosen as the station for the Mossad in Asia in the 1970s (Beit-Hallahmi 1987:26, Abadi 2004: 179). Due to this type of military cooperation, Singapore received unwanted attention.

A few Latin American armies, including Guatemala and El Salvador received military training from Israel. Israel's relations with Iran under the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi were characterised by robust cooperation between the secret services and militaries. From 1954, SAVAK (Iranian Secret Police) got guidance from Israeli agencies and the representative of the IDF sent to Tehran later on became a military attaché in Iran (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 11). Israel also offered advice and training to Iranian army to fight against dissidents in the southern parts during the early 1960s. Military ties continued until their ties were snapped by the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Parsi 2005, Parsi 2006, Segev 1988). There was a similar cooperation with Turkey as well where it received help setting up its security services. The Mossad had a station in Turkey since the 1950s and, following the Trident agreement of 1958, the Israeli intelligence services had provided training to the Turkish secret services (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 16).

In some instances, countries with which Israel did not have diplomatic ties cooperated in matters related to secret services. For instance, Ghanaian secret service allegedly continued intelligence cooperation even after official ties were snapped ties in 1973. This was the case with India, too. As noted by P.R. Kumaraswamy, "There was also prolonged cooperation between Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and its Israeli counterpart, Mossad. Such cooperation existed even when Indira Gandhi, generally considered unfriendly toward Israel, was Prime Minister (1966-77 and 1980-84)" (Kumaraswamy 1998b). After the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the RAW sent its personnel to Israel for special training during late 1984 (Kumaraswamy 2010: 241-243, Joshi 1993). Mossad's involvement was seen in other Asian countries such as Thailand and Sri Lanka as well between mid-1970s and early 1980s. As it was with Singapore, there was a station in Bangkok during the 1970s,

and Israel's SHABAK personnel trained the Sri Lankan army during the early 1980s for counterinsurgency activities (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 33-34).

During a hostage situation or other crisis scenario, Israel provides certain amount of military assistance to bring the situation under control. Although this does not take place frequently, the rescue operation that was carried in Entebbe airport (in Uganda) in 1976 after a French aircraft was hijacked was a landmark event (Butime 2014: 86, Ojo 1988: 73). This episode strengthened Israeli-Kenyan ties. Even during the September 2012 Nairobi mall attack, an Israeli military advisory team was flown in to Nairobi to advise "negotiating strategy", and a few reports indicated that its forces were involved in the operation to end the siege (JP 2013). Such a quick reaction to the situation has highlighted its longstanding military-security ties with this East African country.

#### *d. Intelligence and Counterterrorism Cooperation*

Military cooperation is not defined by mere arms trade alone. Forging of cooperation in intelligence sharing, counterterrorism measures and sharing of information on hostile groups or terror organisations have increasingly become an important dimension of Israel's military ties. Many of the arms clients have begun to benefit from its experiences in fighting armed groups operating in the hostile neighbourhoods. Over a period of time, Israel has gained immense skill in combating different kinds of terrorism. Along with this, intelligence gathering about terror activities has become extremely professional. As a result, some of the military partners have the advantage of cooperating on these matters. The willingness to give counterinsurgency and counterterrorism trainings to several armed forces worldwide can be construed as a sign of importance attached by Israel to the recipient countries.

The rising guerrilla movements and the penetration of the PLO during the late 1960s and 1970s triggered cooperation in these spheres with a few Central American countries (Jamail and Gutierrez 1986). This was prominently witnessed in Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 149-166, Kaufman *et al.* 1979, Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 76-95). This kind of cooperation is also witnessed with countries like Egypt and Jordan in West Asia and, India and Philippines in Asia.

The regime of Ferdinand Marcos of Philippines also received aid from Israel for counterinsurgency operations (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 29).

Intelligence sharing and counterterrorism fields represent a significant area of Indo-Israeli military cooperation. Repetitive cross-border attacks on Indian territorial sovereignty encouraged India to seek assistance from Israel, which has long suffered similar threats (Inbar and Ningthoujam 2011: 77-78). In 2001, both the countries established the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism. Furthermore, Israel-made technologies have been used along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, and the November-2008 attacks in Mumbai stirred a growing interest in counterterrorism techniques. In the past, Indian troops were trained by Israeli commandoes (Bajwa 2014). Similarly, for the purpose of intelligence gathering and information sharing, Israel forged cooperation with several African countries, including Algeria, Morocco and Sudan. For example, Israeli military advisers were involved in training Ethiopian military for counterinsurgency activities (Gitelson 1976).

Absence of diplomatic relations did not deter Israel from cooperating in intelligence gathering and information sharing. During the 1970s, Indonesia, which is the world's most populous Muslim country and is publicly hostile to Israel, had such cooperation with the latter, and Mossad had a station in Jakarta "under a commercial cover" (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 32). This was the case with Ghana when its secret service continued to have contacts with Mossad even after their diplomatic relations broke up in October 1973.

Since the past few years, Israel and a few Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, are conducting certain back-channel security-related cooperation. The controversial Iranian nuclear programme, widespread turmoil in the region, particularly with the rise of Islamist terror organisations, has brought these countries closer, though tacitly. In this arrangement, it is the rapprochement that is taking place between Israel and Saudi Arabia which is attracting a considerable attention. As noted by a few US officials, "Even though Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have long viewed Israel as the Arab world's biggest adversary, the rise of threats they all share in common is

creating a new urgency to find common ground” (Cooper 2014). In the words of James Dorsey,

Saudi Arabia still declines to forge official ties with Israel as long as it refuses to withdraw from territories it conquered during the 1967 war. But perceptions of common threats have expanded long-standing unofficial ties to the point that both the kingdom and Israel feel less constrained in publicly acknowledging their contacts and signaling a lowering of the walls that divide them (Dorsey 2014).

Along with Israel, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have their own concerns regarding the gradual disengagement of the US from the region and the growing influence of Iran due to which they are professionalising their intelligence services and capabilities (Long 2015; Henderson 2015).

In continuation to their clandestine contacts, Israeli and Saudi intelligence officials shared information on Iran’s nuclear programme. The Saudis were allegedly prepared to assist Israel for any anti-Iran mission, including refuelling the latter’s aircrafts and allowing use of its airspace (Lewis 2015). Their engagements are likely to remain based on their strategic interests, and the Iranian issue will likely remain an incentive for furthering the back-channel diplomacy.

#### *e. Co-production*

Co-production and joint-ventures have become important aspects of military cooperation between Israel and a few countries. In some cases, its defence industries receive military technologies or financial assistance from external source like the US and, it also helps defence manufacturers of its clients in developing certain weapons systems by transferring technology and funds. Following the October War, Israel started to receive a large volume of military aid as well as military technologies from the US, thus giving leverage to its benefactor to wield considerable pressure of its weapons exports.

Since Israel has become a coproducer of several weapons systems with the United States and a recipient of U.S. technology and scientific data, the United States with again have the opportunity, if not political desire and will, to exert veto power on Israel sales in the near future (Reiser 1989: 219).

For long, major US companies such as Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin have not only been cooperating with Israeli defence industries but also



providing technologies for various weapons systems, including fighter jets and anti-missile systems.

Transfer of foreign funds and technology is an important feature of Israeli-US co-production ventures. Iron Dome anti-missile system, manufactured by Rafael, is one such system which is partially funded by the US. Similar financial and technological assistance applies for the development and co-production of other missile defence programmes as well, such as Arrow and David's Sling (Zanotti 2015: 35, Clarke 1994). In May 2010, US President Barack Obama requested the US Congress to provide US\$205 million for the production and deployment of the Iron Dome anti-missile system (*Reuters* 2010). Going a step further, in March 2014, both the countries signed an agreement to continue cooperating in the production of this system, whereby the US agreed to transfer US\$429 million to Israel in support of the procurement (*Ha'aretz* 2014, Sharp 2015: 9, Missile Defence Agency 2014). Along with manufacturing of component, the agreement signed would provide "the U.S. Missile Defence Agency (MDA) with full access to what had been proprietary Iron Dome technology". Rafael and Raytheon would take up the co-production activity. In 1990, the US contribution to the Arrow programme was US\$52 million and it touched almost US\$131 million in 2015 (Sharp 2015: 12).

Co-production, involving funds and Israeli-origin technologies, with foreign markets, including India and South Korea is on the rise. This is mainly seen in the field of aviation systems, electronic warfare systems, missile and anti-missile technology. For example, in July 2015, Canada's Armed Forces purchased the radar technology which is a part of Iron Dome, and the production is a joint-venture between Rheinmetall Canada and Rafael (Makuch 2015). Various Israeli defence firms also carry out such joint-programmes with Korea's aircraft industry for the development of avionics and other sub-systems for helicopters and fighter jets.

Venturing into co-production programmes is a major breakthrough in the Indo-Israeli military cooperation. From a mere seller-buyer relationship, it is being upgraded to that of joint collaboration (Kumaraswamy 2013b: 47). In the case of India, importance to joint initiatives was given in May 2007 when the Cabinet Committee on Security cleared a joint venture worth US\$2.5 billion for the co-production of medium-range

surface-to-air missiles (MRSAM) (Inbar and Ningthoujam 2011: 10, Srivastava 2007). Similar cooperation between IAI and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is extended to the development of long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) Barak-8. The successful test-firing of this missile by the Indian Navy in December 2015 was one of the manifestations of Israel's co-production programmes with its foreign clients. In February 2015, an agreement for a joint-venture between private-owned Indian firm Kalyani and Rafael was signed for the development and production of high end technology systems within the country, and this includes "Missile Technology, Remote Weapon Systems and Advanced Armour Solutions" (Kalyani Group 2015). India would produce Spike anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) under this agreement. Prior to this, in 2013, under a joint-venture between Bharat Forge and Elbit Systems-BF Elbit Advanced Ltd.- a proposal was made to "develop, assemble and manufacture defence systems, particularly artillery and mortar systems and ammunition" (Raghuvanshi 2015).

These activities have highlighted the extent to which Israel has penetrated into the defence market of its clients by providing a complete package and has managed to secure a position amongst the various mega international arms exporters.

### Conclusion

The political and security challenges faced by Israel since its establishment have been responsible for the setting up of a robust arms industry. The manner in which it has emerged to be one of the largest arms exporters in the world is worth reckoning as it reached this stage after several years of upheavals. The same challenging factors could be attributed for using arms sales as an instrument of its foreign policy. This was mainly due to its limited political and economic clout over different countries in the world. Most of the relations it forged during between 1960s and 1990s had a strong military-security component, whereby its willingness to supply arms and military technologies took the front seat. This is irrespective of which government rules that country, and the relevance could be seen till today. Most of its current relations with countries in Asia and Latin America are dominated by a considerable military cooperation. In the light of this, the next chapter discusses how its arms sales facilitated the normalisation of relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in January 1992.

## Chapter Three

### Israel-China Military Relations

This chapter examines Israel's military relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) mostly during the period when they did not have diplomatic relations. The historical background of the ties is discussed in this chapter highlighting the various phases since Israel recognised China in January 1950. An important aspect is the usage of arms sales to promote its relations with China before they established their diplomatic ties in 1992. This chapter also highlights the problems that were responsible for the delayed normalisation of ties. The latter part of the chapter discusses how the military contacts developed in the late 1970s facilitated the growth of economic and political connections ultimately leading to normalisation. Their relations until 1992 were rather a "hide-and-seek" affair (Shichor 1994).

#### Historical background

An interesting aspect of the Sino-Israeli ties was that normalisation happened only in the early 1990s despite Israel's recognition of China four decades earlier. Both the countries had missed a few opportunities that could have led to the establishment of diplomatic relations. Several factors were attributed to the delay such as the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Bandung Conference of 1955 and China's close ties with the Arab states and its traditional support for the Palestinian issue.

In May 1948, when Israel was established, China's Republican Government under the leadership of Guomindang was fighting a civil war against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After this lengthy war, Mao Zedong declared the establishment of China on 1 October 1949. In the words of Gerald Segal:

China and Israel were new but claimed links to great and ancient civilisations. Both states were also born with a strong dose of the ideology of revolution, although the Zionist dream was more socialist than communist and on a much smaller scale. Both states were also strongly nationalistic (Segal 1987: 196).

These commonalities could have laid favourable conditions for diplomatic ties but did not.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were the period when the new Chinese leaders showed an interest for diplomatic recognitions with Israel. Israel was also interested in expanding its diplomatic representation in others parts of Asia. Both the countries wanted to end the isolation they faced in their respective regions but normalisation was a challenge both at home and abroad. Israel was slow in transforming its recognition into diplomatic relations. Concerted efforts were made by both the countries but nothing came out of them. When contacts were still progressing, the Korean crisis broke out.

The most favourable period of the relations was that between Israel's recognition of China on 9 January 1950 and Bandung Conference in April 1955 (Han 1993: 64). The main reason was their mutual ignorance of each other. According to David Hacohen, the former head of the Israeli diplomatic mission in erstwhile Burma, "there were probably hardly a dozen people in Israel who knew China and its present regime in 1954" (Ibid: 64). Chinese ignorance of Israel was probably even greater. Hacohen's Chinese counterpart in Rangoon in the mid-1950s, a very senior Chinese diplomat and early principal interlocutor with Israel, was most unlikely unaware that Israel and Egypt were then technically at war with one another (Ibid: 65).

The earliest event that destroyed the opportunities for diplomatic ties was the sudden outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. Before the advent of this crisis, Israel had maintained a policy of non-identification by not aligning with bloc politics of the Cold War. It maintained relations with both the superpowers but during the Korean War Israel started moving closer to the US and began to abandon its "non-identification approach" (Shichor 1994: 188-208). Israel tried to get closer to the United States (US) to get military assistance as Arab countries armed themselves with Soviet-supplied arms. As a result, it did not want to refuse any request or pressure from the US.

After a detailed debate on 28 June 1950, the Israeli cabinet decided to establish diplomatic ties with China (Melman and Sinai 1987: 398). Preparations began wherein the foreign ministry recommended "to give an affirmative reply to the Chinese embassy in Moscow with regard to diplomatic relations" (Shichor 2010). Its desire to set up its mission in Beijing was discussed. However, the outbreak of the

Korean War on 25 June 1950 delayed Israel's announcement to establish ties, and was put on hold until tensions in the Korean Peninsula eased. Israel was under the impression that the war would not go on for long but the conflict dragged beyond its expectations. As observed by a Sinologist,

Despite the growing friction between the Chinese communists and Washington, bilateral diplomatic relations were not yet ruled out. Mao Zedong was indeed in Moscow but the Sino-Soviet alliance was not yet signed and, while the gap between the United States and the PRC was growing wider, a terminal break was not yet acknowledged. At the time, Israel was not as dependent on the United States as it became years later. Undoubtedly and naturally, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials in the United State were much more sensitive not only to the mutual Sino-U.S. hostility but also to the anticommunist and anti-Chinese orientation of the U.S Jewish community, than government officials at home (Ibid.).

Both the countries had to wait for four decades to normalise the ties. This war proved Israel's compliance with the US pressure, and changed the equation with the Chinese authorities. The loss of such opportunities was lamented by scholars such as Xiaohing Han who said, "That was one of the rare moments in the forty years preceding the establishment of diplomatic ties that Israel could have taken the initiative" (Han 1993: 65).

Along with the pressure from the US, there were Israeli officials who were not in favour of establishing ties with China (Shichor 1998: 189). This led Israel to denounce China's support of the Korean War, a move that went against the Chinese interests. It began to lean more towards the US and other Western countries. In early 1951, it joined the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which condemned China's involvement in the Korean crisis and abstained from the vote on the latter's entry into the United Nations (UN) (Melman and Sinai 1987: 398-399). It not only grew distant from the possibilities of establishing diplomatic ties, but its relations with the Soviet bloc plunged during the Korean War. This marked a visible departure from its neutrality in the emerging Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. Such a gesture showed the initial influence of the US on the foreign policy of Israel (Bialer 1990). The crisis in the Korean peninsula limited the move for diplomatic ties as China "began to adopt a critical and hostile attitude towards Israel, for the first time" (Shichor 1994: 190). Israel was becoming more dependent on the US, politically and

economically. The 1950 postponement led to two distinct but related developments. One, Israel had formally and forever buried its policy of non-identification; and two, perceived American displeasure over the establishment of diplomatic relations with China sabotaged any moves towards normalisation (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 21).

The manner in which Israel succumbed to the pressure of the US which delayed normalisation with China has been described by Jacob Abadi in the following words:

Unwilling to antagonise Washington, the Israelis decided to reject China's overtures—a serious omission which many Israelis would live to regret. Another factor adversely affecting the friendship between the two countries was the tendency of the Israeli leaders not to become involved in Asian affairs... Israelis had traditionally tended to associate themselves with Europe and its culture and had little desire to become part of Asia (Abadi 2004: 71).

Once the Korean War came to an end in 1953, China began to explore the possibility of establishing ties. For instance, on 9 November 1953, the Chinese charge d' affaires in Finland talked of a preparation “to relay to Beijing a proposal for an exchange of representatives should such a proposal be initiated by the Israeli government” (Shichor 2010). This was the time when the international tension that had emerged out of the war began to ease. China even made certain attempts to persuade Israel to set up an embassy in Beijing. According to Yossi Melman and Ruth Sinai:

China's initiative was based mainly on diplomatic pragmatism—its deep desire to become part of the international system. And one cannot ignore China's sympathy for Israel as a socialist state that had recently liberated from British colonialism (Melman and Sinai 1987: 399).

China began to lay more emphasis on “economic development and modernisation”, and, as a result, needed a more “peaceful environment” (Shichor 1994: 190).

To speed up the process, Chinese diplomats began to initiate meetings with various Israeli officials in 1954. Right after the establishment of Israel, the US and the headquarters of the UN in New York remained the popular venues for contacts between Israel and countries with which it did not have ties. These venues, however, were not feasible for Israel's overtures towards China because of the Cold War politics, and had opted for London, Helsinki and Moscow to normalise contacts with China (Shichor 1979: 22-25; Kumaraswamy 1994a: 18). Owing to the geographical proximity, both had finally opted for Rangoon, the capital city of erstwhile Burma.

The most successful negotiations took place in this city as the establishment of diplomatic ties between Israel and Burma in 1953 had “provided the former with another interesting and geographically closer venue” to pursue China (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 18). During the negotiations, Chinese ambassador Yao Zhoun Ming met with the Israeli emissary David Hacoheh in January 1954, and this was the time when China exhibited its desire to open commercial ties with Israel and the latter mentioned the possibility of sending a trade delegation to China, an idea which was acknowledged by the Chinese officials.

Another meeting that further increased the possibility of more communication was Hacoheh’s meeting with the Chinese premier Chou En-lai in Rangoon in June 1954. Discussions were held on sending an Israeli trade delegation to China and the premier assured that he would personally meet with the delegation (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 19). Chinese officials also talked about a trade delegation which they wished to send to Israel.

Israel sent a five-member trade delegation that visited China between 28 January and 21 February 1955 with an aim to open commercial ties, as a precursor to diplomatic ties. The members (besides Hacoheh), included Daniel Levin, Director of the Asia Department of the Foreign Ministry and his colleague Meir de Shalit; Joseph Zarchin, head of the Export Department of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Moshe Bejarano, an industrialist. The selection of these people to the delegation indicated that the purpose of the visit was more than building commercial contacts and had a political dimension. This visit remained an isolated event as it was not reciprocated by a Chinese delegation, and Hacoheh’s warning to the foreign ministry did not lead anywhere. He was of the view that such visits would not lead to any progress on diplomatic fronts if both the countries did not upgrade the ties to ambassadorial level. Moshe Sharett, who was the Israeli Prime Minister as well the Foreign Minister expressed his caution to Hacoheh before sending another trade delegation to China (Brecher 1974). He was concerned as the Chinese trade mission did not come to Israel as late as March 1955. This non-reciprocity from the Chinese side once again diminished the prospects of forging relations.

By the 1950s, China began exploring the possibilities of warming up to the Arab states, particularly Egypt. The reason for such failure could be attributed to Israel's increasing attention towards enhancing its relations with the Eisenhower administration in the US. This also exhibited its lack of enthusiasm or importance given to the Far East while trying to maintain "close relations with the West", and it was a "historical missed opportunity by Israel" (Abadi 2004: 72). In the words of Yitzhak Shichor,

As Israel's diplomats feared, well before the mid-1950s Beijing had begun to perceive the importance of the Arab and Muslim countries, not only in terms of quantity but in qualitative (anti-Western) terms as well; the disadvantages of Israel's association with Washington; and Moscow's evolving negative attitude toward Jerusalem... Chinese were no longer interested in relations with Israel, which ultimately appeared to be totally submissive to Washington, at least on this issue (Shichor 2010).

Amidst these developments, another important international event which further deteriorated their relations was the Bandung Conference of April 1955 that proved to be a turning point in China-West Asia relations.

The Bandung Conference was one of the most important events that signalled the deterioration of Israel-China relations. After the missed-opportunity to establish formal ties, this conference led to Israel being sidelined internationally. The timing of the conference coincided with rising hostility of the Arab countries towards Israel. Just a year before the commencement of this conference, the five sponsoring countries, namely, Burma, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Ceylon discussed its agenda. Prior to the conference, many of the Asian countries "were confronted with the question of Chinese and Israeli participation" (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 22). While India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was willing to include China in the conference, many other countries, including Sri Lanka, did not approve of this move. Out of the 29 which countries took part in the Afro-Asian conference, 10 had some level of diplomatic ties and only six countries, namely, Burma, Ceylon, the Philippines, Japan, Liberia and Thailand, had full relations with Israel. Four countries-Ethiopia, India, Turkey and Iran had lower level consular contacts; and one participant Cyprus was not an independent state (Carol 2012: XVII). The remaining 18 which were Arab, Muslim and communist countries did not have any relations



with Israel. Although China was not recognised by as many as 18 countries, it was ultimately allowed to participate in the conference. The voice of opposition to Israel's participation in the conference was raised from the Afro-Asian countries. Taking the lead role were the Arab states that vehemently opposed Israel and campaigned for its exclusion.

China's once-friendly posture towards Israel quickly came to an end with the Bandung Conference, and it moved closer to Egypt in particular. It realised the significance of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and economic clouts of the Arab countries became more enticing. The exclusion from this conference can be observed from a couple of angles. According to P.R. Kumaraswamy,

On the one hand, it could be argued that it was harsh treatment of a small struggling state fighting for its existence and Asian identity. On the other, it is possible to assert that various developments after the Bandung Conference only vindicated and justified Israel's exclusion from the Afro-Asian movement. Whichever way one may at the exclusion of Israel, it had far reaching and incontrovertible consequences for Israel and its political struggle for international recognition. The move recognised, legitimised and even institutionalised Arab veto over Israeli participation in any regional gathering (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 23).

Thus, the Bandung Conference had become detrimental to Israel's desire to establish ties with China.

For the Chinese premier Chou En-lai, Bandung was an opportunity to build better relations with the countries from Asia and Africa, and he had emphasised on the need for a peaceful co-existence between the states of varied ideologies. The Chinese leader, during his interactions with the Afro-Asian leaders, started to lay greater emphasis on the need to fight imperialism and colonialism (Boldurukova 2014: 852). This was well received by the participants.

The warming of Sino-Arab ties came to the dismay of Israel. China even supported the final communiqué of the conference which stated:

In view of the existing tension in the Middle East, caused by the situation in Palestine and of the danger of that tension to world peace, the Asian-African Conference declared its support of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the United Nations Resolutions on Palestine and the achievement of the

peaceful settlement of the Palestine question (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1955: 161-169).

The support from China for the Palestinians increased thereafter and this marred the prospects for improvement of ties.

The negative approach shown by China towards Israel's request for normalisation of ties had signalled an emergence of a new political calculation. It was only after the commencement of the Bandung Conference when

Jerusalem realized its harmful implications for Sino-Israeli links and offered China diplomatic relations. This offer was politely rejected by the Chinese. By that time they had already acknowledged the significance of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Palestine problem, as a potential source of political capital (Shichor 1994: 190).

As Israel and China moved farther away, the latter moved close to Arab countries, especially Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser. This completely obliterated the possibilities of reconciliation with Israel. The third party intervention became more prominent during the mid-1950s. The US applied more pressure on Israel while China was getting closer to the Arabs.

It is imperative to understand that the period between 1950 and 1955 was the period of Mao Zedong's "leaning to one side" foreign policy. It was siding unequivocally with the Soviet Union, one of the first states to recognise Israel. The Soviet Union's ties with Israel and Soviet empathy for the Israeli communist party were probably major factors that prevented China from ruling out Israel's legitimacy (Han 1993: 65). Towards the end of 1955, Israel once again showered its interest in normalising ties with China but by then the latter had already become close to the Arab world and Israel started to face hostility not only from the West Asian countries but also from China as well.

Israel-China relations had been plagued by another major regional development just after the Bandung Conference. The outbreak of the 1956 Suez Crisis and the joint invasion of Egypt by Israel, Britain and France kept the relations between Israel and China in cold storage for almost 20 years (Chen 2012: 4). The Chinese considered the act of these three countries as "Tripartite Aggression" (Han 1993: 65).

The antagonistic attitude of China towards Israel was exhibited when it publically and repeatedly condemned the latter for being an expansionist and aggressor. Israel had been billed as “an artificially created... [imperialist] dagger thrust into the heart of the Arab People” (Ibid: 66). During the 1960s and early 1970s, China’s hostility towards Israel was fiercest. The gap between these two countries widened due to the increasing ideological and political differences and China often accused Israel of serving the imperialist cause (Ibid: 66-67).

As China expressed its hostilities towards Israel, the latter started to take up a strong anti-China stance. According to Shichor,

Jerusalem began to regard the PRC, with its radical domestic and foreign policy and, particularly, its rhetorical and material support of the Arabs and the Palestinians, as an enemy. Hence, since the mid-1960s, Israel, now more firmly associated with the United States, began to vote against China’s admission to the United Nations, something never done in the past (except once, allegedly by mistake) (Shichor 1994: 192).

The relations remained frozen for a long time and the only visible activity during the mid-1950s and mid-1960s was China’s growing support for the Arab states and the Palestinian cause. The hope for normalising ties further crashed when China began to take an interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The latter not only supported the Arab states by establishing diplomatic ties with them but had also begun to support the Palestinian armed-struggle against Israel.

A delegation of the newly-formed Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) visited Beijing in early 1965 and PLO was given the permission to open a quasi-diplomatic mission- the first of its kind in a non-Arab country (Ibid: 191). It was after this visit that Chinese began providing PLO with not only resources, political and ideological support, but also weapons including rifles, mines, explosives, grenades and machine guns and other military assistance and training (Shichor 1979: 141). In 1966, there were reports about the Palestinian Arabs receiving arms and Ahmed Shukairy, who was the chairman of the PLO, said “that Communist China is sending arms into the Arab world for use against Israel,” and that “some Palestinians are receiving military training in China” (JTA 1966b). Owing to the burgeoning ties, Palestinian leaders, including Yasser Arafat and his deputies, had visited China frequently, and they

secretly received guerrilla training on Chinese soil (*The Milwaukee Journal* 1970; Wren 1982; Al-Sudairi 2015). In the words of Melman and Sinai,

One of the best known was Sabri El Banna, alias Abu Nidal, who underwent a training course in China in 1972. During those years some of the Palestinian organizations were so influenced by Maoist ideology that they adopted Chinese revolutionary slogans and doctrines (Melman and Sinai 1987: 401).

Thus, China became one of the earliest countries to give help to Palestinians militarily and this became a matter of concern for Israel.

The rapid radicalisation of China's domestic politics also influenced its policies towards Israel. E. Zev Suffot, who was Israel's first ambassador to China observed:

With the radicalization of Chinese politics in general in the 1960s, Israel was branded 'The Zionist Entity', and a 'US bridgehead' or 'US running-dog' in the region, and the Israeli-Arab dispute became the Palestinian people's struggle for national liberation. The Chinese proclaimed that they would have no contact with Israel, the establishment of which was an historic error and a gross violation of human rights. China's international politics, particularly in relations to the Third World and the struggle with western imperialism and its satellites for national liberation placed considerable strain on Israel's China policy, both its ultimate goals and its tactics (Suffot 2000: 107).

One of the important domestic factors that largely governed China's foreign policy especially towards West Asia was the Cultural Revolution. Its policies remained rigid during this phase and the closed economy under Mao's leadership also prevented China from making efforts to reach out to the outside world. The attitude towards Israel became hostile, and "China was still in its revolutionary phase of support for radical Arab states and revolutionary movements. If anything, the intensity of Chinese attacks on Israel increased" (Segal 1987: 197).

During the 1960s and early 1970s, there were no substantial attempts from either of the two countries to improve their ties. The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and emergence of Deng Xiaoping brought to the fore a change in Chinese foreign policy. Under Deng's leadership, the country began to give more attention to modernisation and economic development. The changing trend in the Chinese foreign policy is described by Gregorii D. Suharchuk in the following words,

Exclusive discussions held in the late 1970s and early 1980s under the slogans 'emancipation of consciousness' and 'practice is the criterion

of truth' were a consequence and a means of abandoning the 'leftist course' that had been characteristic of Chinese politics during the last years, and even decades, of Mao Zedong's leadership. The latter slogan also rejected the fundamental principle of the previous epoch that 'this and that is the truth,' which in all likelihood meant that everything done or pronounced by the late leader Mao Zedong was the ultimate truth. The slogan 'emancipation of consciousness' heralded an affirmation of the view that it was useful for China to import 'bourgeois' technology and to plant in socialist soil certain methods and forms of economic organisation and production management from Japan and the West (Suharchuk 1984: 1157-1159).

This transformation in governance happened when Israel's military exports were soaring and its defence industries were giving utmost importance to indigenisation programmes.

Owing to its political and security challenges rights from its establishments and particularly after the October War and Oil Crisis of 1973, Israel looked for clients for arms exports. Beyond earning hard currencies to sustain its Research and Development (R&D) programmes, arms sales were used as a tool to promote foreign relations.

As explained in Chapter Two, arms sales play an important role in promoting Israel's foreign policy. Irrespective of the ideology or political orientation of the ruling coalition in Israel, foreign policy objective remains constant:

(1) to repel hostile attacks and guarantee defence of the state; (2) to gather as many dispersed Jewish people as possible in their ancient homeland; (3) to secure Israel's place in an inhospitable environment and, to whatever extent possible, to alter that environment from a condition of enmity to one of amity; and (4) to offset the country's immediate Middle Eastern isolation by a worldwide network of mutually beneficial cultural, commercial and diplomatic ties (Klieman 1984: 17).

If the attention given towards the African, Latin American and Asian countries from mid-1960s is any indication (Curtis and Susan 1976, Beit-Hallahmi 1987, Bahbah and Butler 1986, Abadi 2004), the military component was prominent, and in some cases such ties were carried out devoid of official relations. For example, Ethiopia continued to receive military assistance from Israel even after it suspended diplomatic relations following the October War (Bishku 1994, Bard 1988/89: 21-27).

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the Bandung Conference, there was a limited reconciliation between Israel and Taiwan that blossomed into robust military contacts (Goldstein 1999a: 19). This came about after the ties between PRC and some of Arab states were cemented. Moreover, the improvement of Sino-US relations during the 1970s, and the consequent reduction of US arms sales to Taiwan were also responsible factors for bringing the two countries closer (Shichor 1998: 69-73, Yee 1981: 93-101).

...Washington needed a reliable, indirect and not too competitive proxy for military supply to Taiwan. As a longstanding US ally with experience in advanced research and development (R&D) and production, whose quest for diplomatic relations with Beijing had consistently been rebuffed since the early 1970s, Israel was a perfect sense (Shichor 1998: 72).

Thus, to a certain extent, the US promoted Israel's arms exports to Taiwan.

Owing to the delicate nature of the ties, the military cooperation between Israel and Taiwan was carried out clandestinely and was primarily focused on missile technology. This was the time when both the countries started to give immense importance to indigenous missile development programmes due to the emerging challenges from their hostile neighbours. Fearing a potential ballistic missile threat from the mainland, Taiwan developed interest in developing or acquiring theatre missile defence capabilities (TMD) (Hildreth 1994: 4). Its arms trade with Israel began from mid-1970s and in 1975, Israel purchased from the US 109 Lance surface-to-surface (SSM) missiles, with a range of 80-mile or 129-kilometres, and it allegedly transferred some of the technology of this system to Taiwan (Goldstein 1999a: 19). It was speculated that Taiwan could produce similar missile systems through this transfer of technology. As a continuation, Israel delivered 41 Shafrir anti-aircraft missiles in 1975, and this deal was made after the US refused to sell Harpoon and air-intercept 9L Sidewinder missiles to Taiwan (SIRPI, Reiser 1989: 216-217). Beyond arms trade, licence was granted for the local production of Israel-made Gabriel-II anti-missile, which was renamed as *Hsiung Feng*; and by 1989-1999, over 500 such systems were produced by Taiwan (Shichor 1998: 72; SIPRI). A similar license was approved for the production of 50 Dvora (renamed as *Hai Ou*) fast patrol boats. Other military items included guns and mortars, Galil rifles, Uzi sub machine guns along with several others electronic components and ammunitions.

The state-owned Israel Aircraft Industries sold Gabriel sea-to-sea missiles for approximately US\$180 million; Tadiran sold know-how and installed facilities for a battery plant along with sophisticated communication equipments at a cost of US\$130 million; and Elbit and Rafael exported command and control electronic systems worth approximately US\$150 million (Goldstein 1999a: 19-20). These military dealings happened even when the Taiwanese government continued to adopt a pro-Arab stance. Military ties dwindled when Sino-Israeli relations were normalised in 1992.

### Beginning of a Rapprochement

Israel-China relations began to take a turn for the better from the early 1970s onwards. Certain domestic and international changes facilitated the new approach. The most violent and radical phase of the Cultural Revolution was over and the country began to devote more attention to international affairs. Chinese leaders had started to give more emphasis on international politics and the rapprochement with the US was instrumental in bettering ties with Israel as well. That said, Israel-China relations did not see an immediate improvement during the early 1970s. The transformation in Chinese policy, particularly towards the US, was mainly because of two important international developments that took place in 1968. According to Shichor,

For one, as a result of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and, moreover, the Brezhnev Doctrine that legitimized it, Beijing began to regard the Soviet Union as an immediate and dangerous threat, not only to China's security but also to that of the world. For another, as a result of the American presidential elections, Beijing believed that the United States was ready to pull out from Southeast Asia, thus becoming a lesser threat than the Soviet Union, and better disposed to improving relations with the PRC (Shichor 1994: 192).

The Czech crisis had raised the threat perceptions of China from the Soviet Union and, as a result, it began warming up to the US.

Finally, on 6 October 1971, the PRC became a member of the UN at the expense of Republic of China (ROC). This time around Israel supported China's admission to the UN, and although there were changes in the equations of these countries, China still had reservations, and according to Suffot,

The ever-growing Soviet threat as perceived in Beijing was accompanied by escalating harshness in the tone and contents of China's positions on the Middle East dispute. Israel was now

presented not only as a tool of 'US hegemonism' but even of Soviet imperialism in the region, and of the 'Soviet American conspiracy' (Suffot 2000: 107).

Although there were positive developments in 1971, China's premier Chou En-lai refused to open normal relations with Israel and continued to condemn the latter's "aggressive war" of 1967 (JTA 1971b). Despite this negative reaction from the premier, China acknowledged "that there is an Israeli state", instead of referring to it as "Zionists-imperialists" (JTA 1971a).

By taking advantage of the changing scenario and as a goodwill gesture, an Israeli Honorary Consulate General was opened in Hong Kong in 1972. This was mainly done in anticipation of diplomatic relations with China. In 1973, Israel even sent professional staffs from diplomatic community to Hong Kong for promoting contacts. However, the Chinese were not very enthusiastic and hence the consular staffs were sent back to Israel within a couple of years, and the Consulate General was left in the hands of a local honorary consul (Suffot 2000: 108). By mid-1970s, prospects for improving relations arose when common interests emerged between Israel and China, namely, association with Washington and the containment of Moscow (Shichor 1994:193).

Although China continued showing support for the Palestinian issue, it had begun to reduce its open hostility and public defamation of Israel. The Chinese media, in particular, had sobered down, even though it once considered the establishment of Israel as a mistake, China had not denounced the latter's right to exist. Israel's vote at the UN, favouring China's entry into the organisation, had paved the way for this gradual thaw. Shichor described this shift in Chinese approach in the following words: "... a distinction was being made between the Israel and the Jewish 'people', who were peace-loving, and the Israeli 'Zionist' government, which was 'aggressive' and 'expansionist, thus providing a potential basis for unofficial people's diplomacy" (Ibid.). These words reflected the importance the Chinese started to give to Israel, and the need for people-to-people contact was emphasised. Subsequently, the Chinese became more careful while identifying themselves with the radical Arab states that were vehement anti-Israel and both officials began to conduct occasional private meeting in different cities of the world.



## The Military Dimension

A significant rapprochement began in late 1970 in the wake of transformation in China's domestic and foreign policies after the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976. As ambassador Suffot reminded,

The radical changes in China's national goals and priorities after Mao's death in 1976 required appropriate revisions in international policy, in the wake of which new opportunities and potentialities presented themselves. This gradually presented openings in the previous complete impasse in Israel-China contacts (Suffot 2000: 108).

The emergence of a reformist leader in China brought in the concept of modernisation and economic development and opened the prospects for further interactions between Israel and China.

Deng Xiaoping believed that modernisation and development were the only two tools that could uplift China out of its economic backwardness. He wanted to "make impressive economic progress in a short time by resorting to any means, including the wide introduction of capitalist economic methods" (Suharchuk 1984: 1158). Writing on the foreign relations strategies adopted by Deng, scholars such as Joseph Yu-Shek Cheng and Franklin Wankun Zhang mentioned:

Chinese foreign relations strategies under Deng covered both the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, during which China had a broad agenda including economic construction and opening to the outside world, national reunification, securing global and regional security, and the establishment of a new political and economic order. Despite dramatic events, such as major changes in Eastern Europe, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the bipolar system and the termination of the Cold War, Chinese foreign relations strategies maintained considerable continuity (Cheng and Zhang 1999: 99).

The diplomatic thinking in China changed and from late 1970s, its leaders opted for pragmatic steps to enhance relations with other countries by not letting the ideology shape the foreign policy agenda (Jia 1999: 169).

In order to facilitate the development process, China had to abandon its self-reliance policy that was prevalent under Mao and adopt an Open-Door policy, and this had led to a significant expansion of its economic ties, internationally. Prior to this, the Chinese leadership was engaged in a self-reliant economic model, and this was one of the goals of nationalism. This policy no longer remained suitable to the developing

trend in the international politics. As explained by a scholar, “the 20-year experience and practice of economic development in China showed that an over-emphasis on self-reliance would lead to isolationism and economic inefficiency, which in the long-run hindered China’s economic development. This self-reliance development model was therefore largely a failure” (Zhu 2001: 15). The transformation in the foreign policy suited Israel’s interest as it was looking to forge relations with the countries in Asia, and especially China (Goldstein 1999a, Abadi 2004: 67-95). Simultaneously, under the new leadership, China began to advocate and promote stability at home as well as abroad. Israel was aware that promoting relations with China “would be a long and slow process that would require a good deal of patience” (Shichor 1994: 196). It was at this juncture that the Sino-Israeli relations started to gain momentum though unofficially and indirectly.

Ever since Israel recognised the PRC in January 1950, attempts to establish diplomatic ties with China were made through political means. It was only in the late 1970s when both the countries had exhibited their desires to warm up to one another with the help of military ties. As no progress was being made through political means, Israel adopted arms sales as an alternative tool to promote its foreign policy interests (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 39-41). It had taken advantage of the opportunities given by Deng Xiaoping and exploited China’s Open-Door policy, in which defence modernisation was one of the most important priorities of the new leadership (Segal 1987: 207).

The improvement of relations between Israel and China was triggered by a convergence of interests. Israel’s desire to sell arms abroad to earn hard currency and Chinese needs for its military modernisation coalesced timely. The military aspect of Israel’s foreign policy helped bridge relations with China. Israel’s ability to refurbish obsolete Soviet-made weapons systems had caught the attention of China. Along with this, China had begun to show immense interest in Israeli military technology (Melman and Sinai 1987: 403, Chen 2012: 4-5, Kumaraswamy 1995: 237). From this period, both the countries started to make efforts to build up military contacts, but the absence of formal relations prevented both the countries from discussing this aspect openly. The secretive nature of military ties continued to be the norm till they established diplomatic relations.

Scholars such as Kumaraswamy have identified a few important reasons as to why Israel had to be cautious while forging relations China in this context.

For strong political reasons, military ties of many states are shrouded in secrecy and more often when it involves Israel. A number of states that are officially at war with the Jewish state have benefitted from intelligence and other forms of security cooperation with Israel. Due to political and security considerations, Israel's censorship regulations are extra careful in allowing revelations about or discussions on arms exports. Thus, all disclosures about Sino-Israeli military cooperation invariably first appeared in the west and were taken up in Israel (Kumaraswamy 1995: 236).

The secrecy maintained by Israel and China while cooperating in military-security arenas for over a decade had led to mutual admiration and understanding, and paved the way for political relations.

In order to protect their interests, Israel and China did not discuss their arms transactions. Both enjoyed maximum benefits from their military cooperation, but at the same time, it was quite controversial in nature. Israel had been accused of retransferring American-origin technologies to China without prior permission (Clarke 1995; Clarke and Johnston 1999). As it depended heavily on the US for politico-strategic supports, Israel had very less leverage to escape pressures from its largest benefactor. The role of the US in halting Israel's arms exports to China is discussed in Chapter Six.

It is imperative to understand the origin of Sino-Israeli military ties, and the contributing factors. The available literature on the subject has pointed at 1975 as the commencement of military contacts and arms trade had begun in 1976 (Kumaraswamy 1994b: 43). A few important events had taken place in 1975. One of the earliest factors was Premier Chou En-lai's proposal for "four-modernisations" programme in 1975 in the field of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence that attracted the attention of Israeli officials, including defence establishment (Chow 2004: 128, Yinger and Simmons 1977: 1). Around this time, the options for China to procure weapons systems were limited. While the Soviet option was no longer available, the reluctance of the Western arms manufacturers to provide sensitive and other dual-use to technology made China look out for alternatives. It was at this time Israel emerged as a possible source. It intensified its efforts to tap the

Chinese defence market, and this route was used in furthering economic and political ties. Scholar like Segal observed that “the essential role for Israeli military aid to China is based on Chinese needs and Israeli skills” (Segal 1987: 207). The main emphasis of China was to pursue a military modernisation programme which would enable it develop technology indigenously. For this, it sought countries which could provide technology on modern weapons systems and Israel, which had become a major weapons producer by then, became a choice for China.

Meanwhile, following the October War, Israel faced a serious diplomatic setback as most of the Sub-Saharan African countries snapped ties (Oded 2010, Gitelson 1976). Apart from the political implications, Israel’s arms industries lost some of their lucrative defence markets. Most of its clients from the African continent snapped diplomatic ties and stopped purchasing weapons systems. Against this backdrop, China’s drive towards military modernisation went in Israel’s favour. This was also the time when military cooperation between Israel and South Africa under the *apartheid* rule came under criticism and pressure (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195-200).

The event that started the military contact between Israel and China was the Paris Air Show in June 1975. This coincided with Chou En-lai’s modernisation programmes. The Israeli pavilion at the exhibition impressed several Chinese officials who were interested in Israeli-made weapons systems and military technology (Melman and Sinai 1987: 403). The display of the Kfir fighter jet, manufactured by the Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), drew the Chinese attention. The export potential of this item has been described by Aharon S. Klieman in the following words:

In 1975 the IAI delivered its Kfir planes, designed and produced in Israel, to the Israeli Air Force. Success in undertaking local manufacture of so sophisticated a plane as the Kfir, together with its performance in actual warfare stimulated the interest of prospective customers abroad. Under pressure from the IAI, the Rabin government gave its approval for marketing the Kfir abroad...(Klieman 1985: 78).

The Chinese interest in Israeli products came at a time when the latter started to develop and produce sophisticated weapons systems such as advanced aircraft, tanks, naval craft as well as tactical and strategic materials, electronics and other subsystems (Sadeh 2001).

After the Paris Air Show, another event that promoted their military contacts was a meeting that took place in June 1978 in Switzerland. This initial-stage breakthrough in bringing the two sides together was made possible with the help of an international businessman Shaul Eisenberg (Kumaraswamy 2005a). The Sino-Israeli military contacts, thus, began in Europe, far from their respective locations. In the same month, for the first time, ministerial level contact between Israeli Defence Minister Ezer Weizman and Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua was established in Zurich (Kumaraswamy 1995: 237). As this happened during their non-relations period, the details of the meeting were sketchy. The sensitiveness of this evolving military contact was described by one in the following words:

There is consensus, however, on two decisive Israeli players on the China game, Prime Minister Menachem Begin and business tycoon Shaul Eisenberg. It was the Likud leader who took the lead in opening up China and prudently thought military cooperation as an effective means. As a leading industrialist-cum arms dealer, Eisenberg provided 'business' cover to Israel's politico-military deals with Beijing. By establishing business outlets in China long before any progress was made in the political arena, he played an important role in the military relationship (Ibid.).

Both the countries took this development as an opportunity to revive the process of reconciliation.

The gradual building of military contacts in the late 1970s happened at a time when Israel's arms exports worldwide soared. Economic gains out of the sales remained a high priority to sustain the R&D programmes. Along with this, there was a political dimension to arms exports as it wanted to strengthen foreign relations. China was one of the important priorities in Asia. The centrality of arms sales in the foreign policy was described aptly by Moshe Dayan when he said, "small nations do not have foreign policy but defence policy" (Klieman 1988: 141). It was this military aspect which led to the improvement of the Sino-Israeli ties.

During the early stage when they started to build military contacts, both countries preferred to keep the ties as a low-key affair and refrained from talking about it. That Israel could open a channel of communication through an alternative means beyond the normal political route indicated the significance of "back-channel" or "quiet diplomacy" (Ibid: 18-35.).

In short, the dark side of diplomacy-statecraft in the dark-is really the bright side of Israel's foreign relations... In pursuit of the national interest, Israeli leaders have been quite willing to set aside considerations of pride and diplomatic protocol, and to make their peace with backdoor respectability. Formalities and the ceremonial have been waived countless times under the dictates of prudence. When circumstances discourage or preclude direct, open relations, Israel is prepared to enter indirect and secret talks-if not, at the ambassadorial level, then under the auspices of third parties. And in the absence of a joint public communiqué at the end of such talks, then here, too, Israel has been known to rest content with gentlemen's agreements and informal undertakings on a strictly businesslike basis (Ibid: 40, 42).

The political and security challenges it began to face right from its establishment necessitated the deployment of this diplomacy, and the same tactic was used vis-à-vis China.

By the end of 1970s, most of Israel's military relations with other countries were characterised by arms exports. Although it was not among the top ten arms exporters, weapons systems designed and manufactured by Israeli defence industries were preferred far and wide. This was evidenced by the arms exports figure that notched up to approximately US\$250-300 million in 1979, as compared to US\$50 million 1975 and 1976 (Klieman 1984: 13, SIPRI 1980). By 1980, Israel's arms exports reached US\$1.2 billion (SIPRI 1982: 88). Many countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, Central America and South America purchased arms from Israel and the contributing factors for this phenomenal surge in the exports and that of defence indigenisation programmes have been highlighted in Chapter Two.

International opportunities provided... the chance to merchandise arms, whether to established clients like the Shah of Iran or to new purchasers like South Africa canvassing the world market in quest of their own defence needs, enters the equation in the seventies as a function of worldwide rearmament... a combination of factors thus facilitated and help to explain the takeoff in Israeli arms sales in the late 1970s: the upgrading of Israeli army which released large surplus stocks; the ability to produce sophisticated weapons systems at competitive prices; and seemingly limitless demand for weapons and for alternative suppliers (Klieman, 1985: 24).

While discussing Israeli arms sales diplomacy, one could never ignore the role of the Israeli governments. Figures like former chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres who was the then Defence Minister in the Labour Government from 1974-1977

were instrumental in formulating or stimulating the defence-related programmes. Irrespective of internal differences, Israeli governments shared a set of goals in confronting security challenges.

Arms sales have become an important political instrument for the furtherance of Israel's foreign policy interests. In the case of China, arms sales not only preceded formal relations but even facilitated politico-diplomatic relations. Arms diplomacy with China was prominent between late 1970s and 1980s. It was the time when the arms sales were at its peak but concrete details are not available as both sides maintained a high level of secrecy. The secret relationship between China and Israel, especially between 1980 and 1989 was one of the longest China's diplomatic histories. This was the period when both the countries made attempts to establish diplomatic ties, through economic, cultural, academic and military approaches. Despite China's demand from Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, it did not reject the latter's right to existence. It was also during this period it gained access to Israeli-made weapons system and technologies.

The growth of contacts between Israel and China was exposed on 16 April 1979 when Ze'ev Schiff, a military correspondent of the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* highlighted the glimpse of the hitherto clandestine relations between the two (Melman and Sinai 1987: 396). It was his report on the Israeli and Chinese exchange in Beijing in March that exposed the under-cover burgeoning role played by Eisenberg. Aware of the political fallout, Defence Minister Ezer Weizman, urged the media not to follow up more stories and there were no explicit reactions from the Chinese officials but they were believed to have expressed displeasures with the leaks that could damage the future ties. Since then a wave of rumours and reports had proliferated in the international media regarding the hidden military, trade, agricultural, tourist, scientific and industrial links between Israel and China despite the absence of diplomatic relations (Kumaraswamy 1995: 237-239, Reiser 1889: 217-218).

Despite its support for the Palestinian cause (Shichor 1979: 117-118; Harris 1977), China realized the importance of Israel and nurtured its relationship. Few important traits where the latter could be of immense help included advanced technological projects, security and defence expertise and products, agricultural assistance, etc.

Such a remarkable transformation was made possible because of the change in the leadership in the late 1970s. National interests to achieve economic, strategic or military dividends were stronger than ideology. This applied to both the countries where pragmatic considerations became relevant and the timing was very favourable to China as it was seeking to vitalise its economy and update its army and obsolete arsenal (Segal 1987: 207, Evron 2014: 240-241). The rift between the Soviet Union and China from the late 1960s brought a shift in the latter's foreign policy and improved ties with the US, which culminated in the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. There was a convergence of interest of these two countries as they sought to limit the expansion of the Soviet Union in West Asia. This trend had a major role in transforming China's attitude towards Israel.

An important incident that bridged the relationship between the two was the border war between China and Vietnam in 1979. People's Liberation Army (PLA) was in an extreme state of crisis due to its inability to defeat the Vietnamese forces decisively. Although it had the largest standing army, the opponent was better equipped militarily. The PRC needed military and technological assistance, preferably from suppliers with experience in Soviet-made arms, and with the capability to upgrade. As Israel had successfully fought wars with the Arab countries, particularly the June and October Wars, despite its diminutiveness in geographical and demographic terms, China admired its military prowess. The ability to undergo modification on Soviet-era weapons systems, which was also the major components in the Chinese stockpile, attracted the attention in Beijing. A scholar was of the view that "Cheap PRC weapons have to compete more with sophisticated Eastern European stocks. Israel's cooperation in upgrading PRC weapons and its willingness to transfer technologies is bound to enhance and improve the quality of PRC arms imports" (Kumaraswamy 1999: 145). Some of the Soviet-origin military items transferred to China in the past included MiG- 23S fighters, Mig-23 engines, MiG-21 MF and Sukhoi SU-2 bombers, SA-3 and SA-6 surface-to-air missiles, T-62 tanks and Sagger anti-tank missiles. These were the systems which could be upgraded or modernised by Israeli expertise.

Regarding Israel's expertise and experience vis-à-vis Soviet weapons and systems, it is observed:



A number of factors contribute to the special position enjoyed by Israel in this field. Its familiarity and battle experience with Soviet weapons and systems to Arab countries gave Israel an opportunity to upgrade these inventories as well as develop effective countermeasures. It had also carved out a name for itself by prolonging the life of a whole range of Western and Soviet aircraft through repairing, refurbishing, upgrading, and retrofitting them. Likewise, some of the avionics developed by Israel can be easily absorbed by Soviet frames and thereby enhance and improve their performance (Kumaraswamy 1994b: 47).

The Sino-Vietnamese border clash was followed by a visit by an Israeli delegation to Beijing in 1979 and had officials from IAI, Tadiran and Israel Military Industries (IMI). Since then military contacts developed in full swing and gave an opportunity to China to examine Israeli weapons first-hand, especially those modified Soviet weapons captured from the Arabs. A few of the defence items sold by Israel to China included electronic fire control systems for Soviet-made T-69 and T-72 tanks, night-sight scopes for tanks and naval equipment, 105-mm cannons for Soviet tanks, and communications and radio systems (Melman and Sinai 1987: 404).

The gradual establishment of military contacts happened at a time when Israel needed clients to sell its weapons systems. Arms exports during the late 1970s and early 1980s were mostly for commercial purposes and such trade helped in coping up with the economic crisis affecting the defence industrial complex. The opening of the Chinese market was a compensation for the simultaneous loss of some of Israel's most profitable arms market: Iran, whose new revolutionary leaders cut off all relations with Israel in 1979; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) West European members (particularly unified Germany), which drastically cut their military spending; and South Africa, whose post-apartheid government has chosen to dissociate itself from Israel, primarily in military matters (Shichor 1998: 68). Besides the efforts taken by Israel and China, it was also the prevailing regional and international events that strengthened this military contact.

The difficulty in explaining the diplomatic component of such arms sales was due to the reluctance of the two governments to expose or discuss their military contacts which began well before their diplomatic establishment. Moreover, China had close ties with the Arab countries and the Palestinians. A few of the unconfirmed reports of Israel's arms transfers to China are given below:

- Alleged cooperation with China on improving its 9,000 battle tanks by supplying L7 105 mm smooth-bore guns with thermal fume-extraction sleeves and matching shells, fire-control systems, night vision equipment, range-finders, stabilizers, and reactive armour protective devices.
- Designing or redesigning missile technologies for China's DF-3 (CSS2) intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM), the DF-15 (also known as M-9) short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM), as well as the PL-8H surface-to-air missiles [SAMs]; PL-9 air-to-air missile, and a variety of other missiles including anti-tanks guided missiles based on the Israel's Mapatz.
- Upgrading China's outdated MiG-derived fighters and designing new ones primarily the J-10, based on the technology developed for the aborted Israeli Lavi project.
- A variety of other projects such as electronic warfare, intelligence and surveillance measures, airborne-refuelling technology, early warning and control systems and radar technology for China's submarines (Ibid: 70).

These give an impression that most of the dealings were concentrated on military technology transfers rather than supplying or selling arms. Shichor argued that "While there is circumstantial evidence to substantiate some of them, it is by no means certain that all have been undertaken" (Ibid.). Under such circumstances, China would have not spent so much on procuring most of these items. Further, the value of Israel's arms exports to the East Asian countries during mid-1980s and mid-1990s was estimated at US\$300 million, and this figure could not substantiate the report which mentioned the overall value of the military agreements by 1984 as US\$3 billion (Shichor 2000, Kogan 1995: 34).

While pursuing the military relations, both the countries faced certain advantages and disadvantages. No other country had a better knowledge and experience in fighting Soviet weapons, or in upgrading and integrating them. Israel had acquired some of the best-advanced technologies from the US and developed its own. This close integration between the two was admired by many countries, including China. This was primarily because,

Over the years Israel's association with the United States has proven both an asset and a liability in terms of Israeli arms diplomacy. There are instances where identification with the United States and the West gave Israel a relative advantage... the image enjoyed by Israel in its relations with the US may have worked to improve its stature in the

eyes of the would-be clients who turned to Jerusalem as a conduit for the resale and re-export of American arms, and possibly as a source of influence on American congressional and public opinion in their quest for U.S. economic or military aid (Klieman 1985: 168).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the US promoted Israel's arms exports to China. For China, there was a key disadvantage with such arms sales diplomacy vis-à-vis Israel. If this diplomacy based on arms sales became public, then its relations with the Arabs and the Palestinians would be hard-hit, and this resulted in the diplomacy being conducted in secrecy. Diplomacy through arms exports became successful due to supports given by various ministries in Israel. The establishment of economic relations with China was promoted by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Simultaneously, the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not be sidelined as it played an important role in supporting arms exports to China although they denied the existence of such ties for a long time. It coordinated with the Ministry of Defence which dominated most of the decision-making process. Arms sales as a diplomatic was kept as low profile as there no relations, and due to the conditions from China with regard to the Palestinian issue. Shichor argued that,

While the Ministry of Defence seems fully aware of the political and moral implications of arms transactions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recognized not only their indispensable economic benefits but also their contribution to launching, expanding and consolidating diplomatic relations... On the one hand, especially since the 1980s, the ministry [Defence] has encouraged the defence-industrial complex to increase exports decrease its growing economic burden and generate fund for military R&D production (Shichor 1998: 78).

Israel also hoped that through its arms exports to China, it could influence the latter to cease its military relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran which was becoming more hostile.

China penetrated into the West Asian arms market after the death of Mao, and emerged as one of the principle suppliers (amongst US, France, Britain, and the USSR). With a motive to augment its military modernisation programmes, arms were sold to Iran to gain hard currency (Rynhold 1996: 106; Pan 1997). For example, from 1983 to 1986, Iran and Iraq consumed approximately 92 percent of Chinese total arms transfer agreements, and nearly 88 percent of all arms transfer deliveries to West Asia in terms of value (Shichor 2000). In the 1980s, China was Iran's single largest

military supplier. Commercial motives mainly triggered these sales and consisted of conventional, missile, nuclear, and chemical weapons. Writing on this subject, Bates Gill remarks:

With the exception of Pakistan and possibly North Korea, China's arms trade with Iran has been more quantitatively and qualitatively comprehensive and sustained than that with any other country. This trade has included the provision of thousands of tanks, armoured personnel vehicles, and artillery pieces, several hundred surface-to-air, air-to-air, cruise, and ballistic missiles as well as thousands of antitank missiles, more than a hundred fighter aircraft, and dozens of small warships (Gill 1998: 57).

Establishing military ties with China was also a politico-strategic move for Israel as this could convince the latter to moderate its pro-Arab policies, and reduce its hostility. As aptly put by Klieman, “The military rationale for transferring Israeli weapons in effect served as the intermediate link between political and foreign policy incentives on the one hand, and economic motives, on the other” (Klieman 1985: 30). It became a close interplay between the Chinese necessity to upgrade its military arsenal and Israel’s opportunity to forge relations.

As a result, Israel’s “statecraft in the dark” was indeed the bright side of its foreign relations (Klieman 1988: 40). It was this, to a large extent, which made possible the establishment of diplomatic relations as it was willing to keep aside pride and diplomatic protocol, and added respectability to backdoor or quiet diplomacy.

Because of this quiet practice, precise information on Israel’s arms transfer to China is not available widely. Both the countries concealed the true dimension of their military relations. It had become very difficult to quantify the military transfers and most of the figures were only estimates. As early as 1984, the estimated value of Sino-Israeli military agreements stood at US\$3 billion, and reached approximately US\$5-6 billion in the early 1990s (Shichor 2000). A RAND Corporation report published in 1991 put the figure at US\$1-3 billion, while estimation by US State Department in 1993 rounded was at US\$8-10 billion. The overall Israeli arms export between 1984 and 1997 was US\$7.78 billion (Ibid.)

## Towards Diplomatic Relations

Israel's establishment of diplomatic relations with China has been attributed to their military cooperation that had begun since late 1970s onwards. Prior to this, their relations were marked by hiccups, mostly due to external factors, including the Chinese support for Palestinian cause. A few international and regional developments also paved the way for the final decision and in the words of Shichor, "while Beijing had evidently been interested in Israel's military technology and experience-particularly against Soviet weapons-well before the late 1970s, no regular link existed until China's Vietnam debacle" (Shichor 1998: 73).

The clandestine military contacts which began from the late 1970s ushered in new prospects for the improvement of the Sino-Israeli ties when various political attempts failed to bring an understanding. The warming of relations was partially facilitated by military contacts during the non-relations period and was described Aron Shai in the following words:

Paradoxically, China's military predicament and needs in the late 1970s and early 1980s helped official China overcome the traditional obstacle the Chinese foreign Ministry had erected in the mid 1950s. Now, relations with Israel seemed to be of increasing significance. It was the beginning of the path leading towards the establishment of proper relations (Shai 2009: 24).

China's growing economy since the mid 1980s, after the emergence of Deng Xiaoping, strengthened its presence in the outside world.

The Chinese political system began to be stable and China's outlook towards the international system changed under Deng. The differences of opinion that existed before were narrowed and China wanted to get more involved in international affairs and play a constructive role in resolving conflicts in the Third World. The changes in foreign policy is described by Lu Shulin, a Chinese diplomat in the following words, "China has always firmly opposed any form of hegemonism and power politics, safeguarded the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries, and actively promoted the establishment of a fair and rational international political and economic new order" (Shulin 1999: 8). With regard to the reaching out to the outside world, he said, "In international affairs, China does not conduct ideological arguments. China respects political systems and development roads chosen by peoples of other

countries. Based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, China will establish and develop normal national relations with all countries” (Ibid: 13).

From the mid-1980s, China’s policies towards Israel became cordial, and interactions were more visible. Both the countries started to engage not only on military spheres but in socio-cultural areas as well. This happened in the backdrop of the pressure of China’s Arab partners against Israel. China’s earlier anti-Israeli stance gradually began to diminish and one of the first signs of the thawing of relations was China’s approval to allow Israeli passport holders to visit the country in mid-1984. This established the contacts and the first few visits comprised of economic delegations during June and July (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2001).

Israeli scholars were invited to take part in academic and scientific conferences which were conducted under the auspices of international groups and associations. As a further signs of improvement in their relations, Israeli tourists visited China. The growing cordiality was not viewed by the Arab countries in a positive way, and they criticised the move of the Chinese officials. As a damage control tactic, during his visit to Egypt in 1985, China’s Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian had to convince the Egyptian officials that his country’s relations with Israel were based on people-to-people contact, “taking into consideration the private and individual interests of American and European Jews” (Shichor 1994: 198). Xueqian did not talk about establishing relations and emphasised China’s adherence to the conditions that there would be no cooperation or relations with Israel as long as the latter continued to wield an “expansionist and aggressive policy” vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue. If the Chinese were to acknowledge their dealings, they would undermine relations with the Arab countries and the Palestinians. As a result, China “denied any hints in the media about this type of activity. Israeli officials never publicly contradicted the denials of their Chinese counterparts” (Chen 2012: 5). Both the countries, however, continued to interact rigorously during the 1980s by taking advantage of the changing dynamics of the international and domestic politics (mainly in China). Owing to positive developments, China no longer used the Arab-Israeli conflict to put off ties with Israel. By mid-1980s, further explorations to establish political relations between these two countries began when officials met at the UN. Chinese officials exhibited desire to actively participate in international affairs.

The change that was emerging from the Chinese side mainly eased the process of reconciliation with Israel. China had not only warmed up to Israel but to other countries in West Asia from early 1970s. According to Shichor,

Beijing's increased attention to the Middle East has been based not only on the specific characteristics of the region and their implications for the PRC but also on general considerations. Most important among these has been a revised attitude toward the Third World. The PRC's post-Mao reforms had necessarily been associated with the Western countries as the principle source of technology, capital, know-how and equipment. The Third World has very little to offer in these respects, and consequently its position on China's foreign policy priority list had been inevitably downgraded (Shichor 1992: 88).

Gradually, by the mid-1980s, China's attention towards the Third World countries had increased.

With its changing ideological position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, China had abandoned its belief that the "Western imperialism (or Soviet-imperialism)" as the origin point for all the international and regional problems (Shichor 1994: 198), including the Palestinian issue. The Camp David Accords signed by Israel and Egypt in September 1978 were endorsed by China, and this was the time when it began to "favour negotiated settlement" to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Han 1993: 67). This transformation was made due to the subtle changes that had come up in the diplomatic thinking of the Chinese officials after Mao's demise (Pan 1999, Rubin 1999: 51). China began to have uncertainties over the settlement of Arab-Israeli conflict without the intervention of external powers and in May 1984, proposed an international conference, with the involvement of the five United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members to resolve the conflict. Through this initiative, it could enhance its "political status as an upcoming great power" (Shichor 1994: 198). This came as a contrast to its earlier policies when "it saw no alternative to the settlement of Middle Eastern conflicts except directly by the parties concerned (peacefully or otherwise)" (Shichor 2013: 26, 30).

As the relations between Israel and China began to improve, there were bilateral exchanges on military, technological and commercial fronts and political exchanges also began to emerge. China purchased military technology and hardware such as armour, artillery, electronics and missiles from Israel worth billions of dollars (Han

1993: 68). There were reports that several Israelis, including army generals, had worked in China during late 1970s and 1980s on various officially sanctioned projects (Melman and Sinai 1987: 404). For example, the Chinese became interested in air technology, and a few officials from the Israeli air force were contacted and invited to visit China in 1985 (Abadi 2004: 88).

It became pertinent that the Chinese had begun to appreciate the military technologies and weapons systems possessed by Israel. For instance, in 1982, an official Chinese publication on arms hinted its interest in the Soviet-origin weaponry captured by Israel during its wars with the Arab countries. The military might witnessed during the 1982 Lebanon War became an important factor that attracted the attention of China. Israel's countermeasures to protect its tanks "by installing special devices to attract the anti-tank missiles and to prevent their penetration" impressed the Chinese military officials (Melman and Sinai 1987: 404). China wanted to procure such technologies. From 1983, most of the military deals struck between the two were believed to be either in the form of military advice or technological aid. Israeli military experts supposedly played active role in refurbishing old Chinese defence equipments. As Segal pointed out, "If Israel has been selling military items to China, it is more likely to be in the realm of technology and advice rather than hardware" (Segal 1987: 207).

As their engagements intensified in the early and mid-1980s, Western media started talking about their military contacts. The London-based *Sunday Times* happened to be the first news outlet that that exposed arms trade. In October 1984, during a military parade in Beijing, one of the guns mounted on a new Chinese tank model was similar to that of Israeli-made 105 mm cannon used in its new tank, Merkava (Reiser 1989: 217). Writing on this, Segal mentioned that, "British sources, apparently incensed that they had lost the refurbishment contract to Israel, leaked to the Western press that the Israeli deal was worth \$3 billion" (Segal 1987: 207), but the deal was lower than the mentioned figure. Another source estimated that this military item "would have cost \$400,000 per tank to fit the new gun, laser guidance, suspension, ammunitions delivery systems, and fire control technology" (*Jane's Defense Weekly* 1985).



Beyond military contacts, the relations had expanded to other fields, and these were mainly science, academics and agriculture. Both the countries worked together to enhance their commercial cooperation. The Chinese showed immense interest in Israeli companies which dealt with agricultural machinery and expertise, solar energy, high technology, manufacturing, robotics, construction, road building and weapons (Broder 1985). In early 1985, a Chinese business delegation visited Israel and explored opportunities to conduct joint-ventures in farming activities. They were received by Israel's Agriculture Minister Arik Nehamkin, and it was the first visit by a delegation from China (Sobin 1991: 116).

Upon the invitation of Chinese authorities in June 1985, representatives from various Israeli industries (most owned by collective farms) visited China. They were issued visas on official Israeli passports, and the delegation was led by Shmuel Pohoryles, director of the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture's Joint Agricultural Planning and Rural Development Authority (Friedman 1985). The delegation comprised of about 40 to 60 representatives and was conducted by Israel's Foreign Ministry and signified the importance adhered by Israel in warming up to China. This was the first visit of Pohoryles and the delegation using Israeli passports. Officials from both the countries agreed to establish enterprises by taking up projects, including an "airfield, 10 hotels, solar energy plants, and agricultural development involving Israeli know-how, capital and technology" (JTA 1985a). In 1985, companies of both the countries signed contracts worth US\$2 billion, mostly through their overseas subsidiaries (Sobin 1991: 116).

In order to move further closer to China, Israel reopened its Consulate in Hong Kong in 1985 that was closed in 1975. The calculus behind the decision has been explained by one in the following words:

The presence in Hong Kong of various Chinese institutions, companies, banks and semi-official representations provided an excellent opportunity for Israel. Its geographic, political and cultural proximity with the mainland enhanced the position of the tiny but influential colony. In addition to its well connected communication networks, shipping and port facilities and experienced market skills of the Chinese businessmen based there, Hong Kong provided the much need "diplomatic convenience" (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 65).

Likewise, Shichor indentified two key reasons for Israel's decision:

This [Israel's] decision was based on two additional considerations. In the short run, it was meant to provide consular services, information, and whatever logistical support, for Israeli interested in forming relations with the PRC or in visiting the country. Over the long turn, in the event that Beijing would still reject the establishment of diplomatic relations, renewed consulate could provide Israel with a foothold in China from 1997 (when Hong Kong is to return to Chinese sovereignty)... Hong Kong became one of Israel's most important China-watching outposts and, moreover, a major junction for exchanges with PRC officials (Shichor 1994: 199).

The consulate facilitated discussions on matters related to economic and diplomatic issues, and became a channel through which businessmen, academics, and tourists from Israel made their way to China. Apart from its regular services of keeping contacts with the local Jewish community, and promoting ties between Israel and the colony, "the consulate general also acted as an advanced logistical base, offering services to the few Israeli companies and individuals wishing to develop business interests in the PRC" (Shai 2014: 36).

Israel's decision to reopen the consulate in Hong Kong came at an opportune time as it coincided with its exploration of the Chinese defence market. It organised a five-member military delegation from the IMI to China in November 1987, and this was done to demonstrate "Israeli missile capabilities" (Kumaraswamy 1995: 240). This trip was conducted cautiously and its purpose was kept secret. However, the entire motive was exposed when one of the key Israeli arms dealers was apprehended in Hong Kong with a forged passport of Philippines (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 66).

As the contacts were strong, the international media tried hard to decode the nature of their ties. In a rare move in 1985, Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin was asked by the media about Israel's military exports to China. He denied the existence of such relations by saying, "We don't talk about any arms deals with countries that prefer not to agree to that... When it comes to China, well, of course, I deny it" (Klieman 1986/87: 127). According to one scholar, Rabin's denial became the "first tacit Israeli confirmation of military relations with China" (Kumaraswamy 1995: 239).

After Rabin's denial, both the countries began to cooperate in developing technology for air force. In 1986, there were reports about an 11-day visit to China by the head of IAI, Joseph Zinger. It has been indicated that "China was primarily interested in

antitank and antiaircraft technology” (Segal 1987: 208). This heightened the suspicion about Israel’s involvement in developing some of the Chinese missile systems and aircrafts. Beginning with the meeting between the Israeli and Chinese representatives to UN in New York January 1986, Director-General of Prime Minister’s Office Avraham Tamir had confidential meetings with unidentified Chinese officials in Paris in September (JTA 1986a). For the Chinese, the US had increasingly become a “route into the Middle East”, and according to Segal,

China may be well preparing the ground for a five-power conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict or just genuinely learning about an international problem about which it was previously uninformed. For a country in the midst of a generational change, China may simply be taking its time in adjusting to a new foreign-policy pragmatism (Segal 1987: 209).

Further interactions took place between the ambassadors of Israel and China in France in late 1986. There was, however, a constant denial from the Chinese side but the period between 1986 and 1988 had seen intensive meetings between Israeli and Chinese officials.

The year 1987 was important for Israel’s arms sales diplomacy. Its engagements with China had also witnessed some improvements. In March, Tamir, along with other officials, met with China’s ambassador to the UN, Li Luye. Probably out of the concerns vis-à-vis the Arab countries, China insisted on covering up this meeting as a part of “regular consultations” which were initiated by the permanent members of the UNSC, and not related to bilateral relations (Shichor 1994: 199). China had started giving clear signals of its desire to expand its relations with Israel beyond mere economic contacts, and establish diplomatic relations. In a quick succession, Israeli Foreign Minister Peres met with his Chinese counterpart Xueqian in September-October 1987, and this was the highest-level meeting between the two countries since 1948. This event was considered crucial as both agreed to institutionalise political exchanges at the level of their UN ambassadors (Ibid.). Moreover, for the first time, China did not reiterate the conditions that Israel should withdraw from all the occupied territories or should satisfy the legitimate rights of the Palestinians along with the establishment of an independent state, to resolve the longstanding Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the front of arms exports, the year 1987 was a setback as Israel had to comply with the US pressure to halt its arms sales to South Africa. As the international campaign against the *apartheid* regime gained momentum, the US decided to impose an arms embargo against South Africa, and it simultaneously threatened to cancel annual military aid to those countries which continued arms supplies to Pretoria. Israel did not want to risk the US military aid and hence ended arms sales to South Africa. The *apartheid* regime was one of the most lucrative defence markets for Israel's weapons during the 1970s and 1980s. The military cooperation not only concentrated on arms trade, but it also included military assistance in training South African pilots, advices in counterinsurgency measures, and co-production of weapons systems, mostly in missiles and aviation sectors (Hunter 1987a, Peters 1992, Polakow-Suransky 2011, Adams 1984). Due to the US pressure, Israel had to look out for other clients and China appeared as the most-suitable market. At the time when it agreed to end military ties with the *apartheid* regime, its arms exports was one of the tools which was used to promote relations with China.

By early 1988, despite the increasing contacts, Xueqian did not talk of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel and was of the view that, "The time is not right at present to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, given the existing situation" (JTA 1988b). That said both continued to have cordial relations through this year, and the meeting between Peres and his new Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen, in September in the UN brightened the chances and two new agreements were signed to establish Israel Academy of Sciences in Beijing, and China International Travel Service (CITS) in Tel Aviv (Maor 2008: 241). During this year, an official from the Israeli foreign ministry paid a secret visit to China to discuss further means to expand economic ties so as to proceed towards diplomatic relations (JTA 1988b). It was believed that both the countries discussed the possibilities of conducting trade in coal and oil as well.

The clandestine nature of the relations has remained a unique feature of Sino-Israeli relations. China, in particular, overcame various hurdles mostly stemming from its close proximity with the Arab countries. It could be argued that the most important phase of the bilateral relations was the unofficial period during which they could establish political contacts, which was also promoted by Israel's readiness to supply military assistance to China. In fact, the pre-eminence of arms export, mostly for

funding in modernisation programmes, was preserved by both the countries, and this aspect became a pivotal incentive in paving the way towards diplomatic establishment.

The relationship between Israel and China reached a new dimension after the ill-fated 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. It was a time when China faced international condemnation for the deployment of the army against a group of unarmed student protestors. Around this period, China's diplomatic presence was widely felt in different parts of West Asia. Significant attention was given to this region due to its domestic modernisation programmes which began from late 1970s. Robust cooperation with the Arab countries was visible in all the three important aspects of foreign relations, that is, political, economical and military. Since the early 1980s, China emerged as one of the important arms suppliers to countries to this region, and particularly to Iraq and Iran, countries which were hostile to Israel (Shichor 2000, Rubin 1999: 48). The hard currency earned out of the arms exports was utilised in the military's modernisations programmes.

The increasing Chinese arms sales to countries such as Iran and Iraq became problematic for the US in particular, due to its strategic interests in the region. For instance, tensions escalated when Iran fired Chinese-supplied Silkworm surface-to-ship missiles against the Kuwaiti offshore oil terminal and US ships in September and October 1987 (Rynhold 1996: 107, Shichor 2000). Despite strong reactions from the US, China continued to develop short-range missiles with the capability to carry conventional warhead, and this included M-9, or Dongfeng (DF-15) surface-to-surface single-stage solid-propellant missile (Shichor 2000). By showing an interest to purchase M-9, Syria and Iran allegedly paid deposit and even invested in the R&D of this system, but neither of these countries received the product as the deal was retracted under intense external pressure. It was believed that China, in early 1986, agreed not to supply this missile to Syria, as its contacts with Israel were on the rise (Shichor 1999: 167). Subsequently, it was pressurised by the US to adhere to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and pushed for participation in the West Asian arms control talks. However, in 1988, it supplied Saudi Arabia with DF-3 ballistic missile for approximately US\$3 to US\$3.5 billion (Meick 2014: 3). The

potential threat of the Chinese military supplies to the Western interests is described by Richard A. Bitzinger as follows:

The transfer of CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia is a good example of how Chinese arms sales can undermine U.S. political goals in the Third World, while the possible sale of M-9 short-range ballistic missiles to Syria or the M-11 to Pakistan could constitute a serious military challenge as well to U.S. or Western interests in the Third World (e.g., threatening Israel) (Bitzinger 1992a: 35-36).

Simultaneously, Shichor underplayed the threat perceptions:

... despite repeated U.S warnings, the DF-3 deal [CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missile-IRBM] and other PRC missile and arms transfers have not upset the Middle Eastern balance of power, nor increased regional tension, weakened U.S. position, threatened Israel or triggered a new arms race. Occasional reports leaked by the CIA and other U.S. agencies about China's continued transfer of missiles and missile technologies to the Middle East, primarily to Iran, have yet to substantiated and remain small in portion to arms transfers by other countries, first and foremost Russia. This is especially relevant to non-conventional military technologies (Shichor 2000).

The US factor in shaping Israel's military assistance to China is discussed in Chapter Six.

The Tiananmen incident isolated China significantly as many of the Western countries severely condemned its aggressive use of force against the protestors. The most hard-hit effect was the imposition of arms embargo led by the US (Archik 2005a: 4-5). President George H.W Bush suspended military contacts and arms sales. On 5 June 1989, an embargo was imposed on arms sales by the president, and the European Union (EU) did the same on 27 June. The ban was imposed not only on the transfers of arms and military technologies, but included suspension of economic transactions, ban on exchange of visits and delegations, and on various economic negotiations and agreements (Archik 2005b: 5). This was a watershed event in the history of China. While this event raised tensions between China and the West, particularly the US, it cemented the Sino-Israeli ties and the resulting opportunities were explored by both as Israel's arms sales diplomacy found a new taker in China.

Israel maintained a visible silence during and after the Tiananmen incident and refrained from condemning China. This nonchalant attitude exhibited by Israel was criticised by some.

Although scores of foreign policy experts attempted to analyze what was happening in China, not one pointed to the parallels between the bloody events in Beijing and the Israeli government's ongoing effort to batter the Palestinians into silence. Yet a comparison of the two situations only underscores the enormity of what Israel is doing to the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza who, like the Chinese students, are demanding their freedom (Marshall 1989: 11).

A couple of reasons apparently compelled Israeli silence. Firstly, “equipment on the tanks used by the Chinese to crackdown on the protesting students included Israel-made 105 mm guns and laser range finders” (Kumaraswamy 1995: 241). This highlighted the level of cooperation between the two. The second reason pertained to increasing attempts to normalise ties with China, and according to Shichor, “Eager for diplomatic relations with the Chinese, it [Israel] practically dismissed the Tiananmen massacre with a rather perfunctory and low-level Foreign Ministry statement. Furthermore, the unofficial Sino-Israeli dialogue that had gathered momentum by the mid-1980s not only preceded undisturbed but made headway” (Shichor 1992: 90). Following the Tiananmen incident, Israel and China had come closer than ever before, and their military cooperation achieved new significance as well as attention from the international community, particularly from the US.

The restriction on arms sales imposed by the Western countries gave an opportunity to Israel to fulfil some of the Chinese military needs. Along with political motives, it was the prolonged recession in Israel's defence industries during mid-1980s that drove the country towards “developing and accelerating its defence and technology exports to China” (Kumaraswamy 1994a: 85). Simultaneously, as observed by the political scientist Xiaoxing Han, “China's use of the Israeli channel to break military sanctions was obviously successful” (Han 1993: 73). By the late 1980s, Israel had already attained a higher degree of sophistication in its weapons production programmes, and its arms exports touched impressive figures and it reached US\$2.0 billion in 1988 (Reiser 1989: 204).

As a result, the Tiananmen incident gave an opportunity to Israel to cater to China's need and convergence of interests brightened the chances of normalisation. As

explained earlier, Israel's growing military cooperation with China happened at a time when similar ties with Taiwan were going on smoothly. In 1992, that is, after Israel and China established their diplomatic ties, the Bush administration gave its consent to Israel to export the same fighter plane containing a US-built General Electric engine to Taiwan (*Los Angeles Times* 1992). This nod was primarily to ward off France from supplying 100 Mirage jets to Taiwan at a whopping cost of US\$10 billion (Richardson 1992). The deal for 40 Kfir jets to Taiwan was estimated between US\$400 million and US\$1 billion. Ultimately, Israel cancelled the jet deal in September 1992 as it came under Chinese pressure. (JTA 1992b, JTA 1992a, Abadi 2004: 67-95). In June 1990, Sino-Israeli moved a step closer as Israel established its first liaison office in Beijing, operated by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (*Los Angeles Times* 1990). China, too, opened its tourism office in Tel Aviv in September 1989.

Owing to difficulties faced by China in securing US-origin technologies for its fighter upgrade, Israel began to collaborate for the production of a new multipurpose aircraft which incorporated technology from the aborted Lavi project (Gee 2007). The new Chinese jet, J-10, was designed and developed by the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation. Beside this development, there are other events that supported the rapprochement between the two countries. Various regional as well as international developments largely diverted China's attention towards Israel. One of them was the establishment of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and China in July 1990 (Jinglie 2010: 23, Al-Sudairi 2012: 3). The concerns of the Chinese officials that getting closer to the Jewish state would upset the Arab countries were dispelled by this diplomatic breakthrough.

After the Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) further softened their positions toward Israel. Moreover, the fact that they found no objection to Taiwan's official relations with Israel "at a certain level", compounded the pressure on China to move even more quickly in its relations with Israel in order to prevent Taiwan from gaining irreversible advantages simply by acting first (Han 1993: 73).

By establishing ties with Saudi Arabia, Israel remained the only country without any Chinese diplomatic representative.



In such a scenario, the interest of China to have a role in the Arab-Israeli peace process became limited. This had sowed further seeds for normalising relations. According to Suffot,

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and Saudi Arabia in the summer of 1990, following closely upon the official opening of the Israeli liaison Office in Beijing in June, demonstrated the success of PRC planning and timing of contacts with Israel, with no discernible damage to the PRC's economic and other interests in the Arab world (Suffot 1999: 112).

In a quick succession, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 provided another opportunity for Israel and China to move closer. The outbreak of the crisis "convinced the Chinese that the Arab-Israeli conflict was not the only source of instability in the Middle East" (Shichor 1994: 202). China no longer adhered to its staunch stand for the Palestinian cause or traditional support for the Arabs. Earlier, it used to put conditions such as withdrawal from the, restoration of Palestinian rights, and ending of aggressive policies, as preconditions for normalisation. The split among the Arabs and the Palestinians (who joined Yasser Arafat in his support for Saddam Hussein) over the invasion disappointed China.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, however, split the Arab world itself down the middle. Particularly outraged were Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, which together had spent billions of dollars supporting such pan-Arab causes as the recovery of Israeli-occupied Palestinian lands, and Saddam's war against Iran. Feeling directly threatened, the Saudis made the hard decision to invite foreign military forces, whom they had spent generations ejecting from the Arabian peninsula, back to participate in the liberation of Kuwait (Curtis 1995: 15).

Following this incident, the notion that Israel wielded "aggressive" "expansionist" policies in West Asia began to be viewed from a different perspective.

Moreover, the restraint showed by Israel during the Kuwait crisis gained Chinese support as it did not retaliate against the Scud missiles fired into its civilians by Iraq. As commented by Shichor, "Had Israel retaliated, the war would have been complicated, expanded and extended, thus leading to disastrous consequences and to further stability thereby undermining China's interest" (Shichor 1994: 203). During the meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and his Chinese counterpart Qichin in New York in October 1990, the latter mentioned that the diplomatic

establishment would largely depend on the progress made in the Arab-Israeli peace process. This was one of the earliest meetings when officials from both the countries explored political means to establish relations.

By the early 1990s, international politics took a new dimension that enhanced the diplomatic manoeuvre of Israel towards China. This had come because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and in 1991, “all the pieces of the puzzles of PRC-Israeli relations finally fell into places” (Suffot 1999: 106). In March, Xiaoping said that Israel should be recognised as it had always supported the ‘one China policy’ and most importantly China’s legitimate rights at the UN. The incentive for establishment of diplomatic relations came from a combination of international and regional developments (Shichor 1994: 203).

The preparations for the Madrid Conference in 1991 contributed to the cementing of contacts as the conference had “created a new reality in the Middle East” (Bentsur 2002). In the words of Eytan Bentsur, the former Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry,

The October 1991 Madrid Peace Conference represented a breakthrough in relations between the State of Israel and the Arab world. For the first time, Israel engaged in direct, face-to-face negotiations with all its immediate neighbours, and not just with Egypt, with whom Israel had signed a peace treaty in 1979. These talks were between the political leaders of the region, unlike the armistice discussions that Israel undertook in the late 1940s and 1950s. Madrid also launched a multilateral process that brought Israeli diplomats into contact with representatives of Arab states from North Africa and the Persian Gulf (Bentsur 2002).

The conference opened the channel of negotiations between Israel and the Arab world. As normalisation of relations became a precondition to join the peace talks, it pushed China to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Amidst the political efforts, the military dimension did not lose its relevance. The clandestine military contacts which began from late 1970s helped, to a certain extent, strengthen the engagements between the two countries. The need for military technologies for its modernisation drive made China reorient its policies, and became logical to improve political ties. As a last minute preparation for a breakthrough, Israel’s Defence Minister Moshe Arens visited China in November 1991, a “move

widely seen as paving the way for diplomatic links” (William 1992). As a mark of improvement on the political front, on 16 December, China changed its anti-Israel stand in the UN by overturning the earlier resolution that equated Zionism with racism adopted in November 1975 (Lewis 1991, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991). Meanwhile, during mid-January, Mark Regev, the Israeli Vice-Consul in Hong Kong hinted at a diplomatic breakthrough when he said,

...hopefully by the end of the week, we will have officially announced diplomatic relations. China has historically been quite hostile to Israel. Look at the period of the (1966-76) Cultural Revolution in China when they were going through their very, very radical period. They identified with the PLO...not just the PLO but the most radical Palestinian groups...They also had historically very close connections with Iraqis, Libyans, Syrians. They also voted for the (U.N.) Zionism-as-racism resolution. We could always be sure the government in Beijing would be (supporting) the most radical Arab positions and hostile to us... just over the last couple of years, it has slowly been changing... For us, this is very positive. After all, China is a member of the Security Council, and China is a power in East Asia. So from a diplomatic point of view, this is very important...(Holley and Courtney 1992).

Thereafter, Levy arrived in Beijing on 22 January 1992 and announced the normalisation of relations and on 24 January 1992, Levy and Qichen signed the joint communiqué in Beijing on the establishment of diplomatic relations. This opened China's door to the Moscow conference that took place on 28-29 January. Right after the establishment of official relations, Qichen said, “China has good relations with the Arab countries... I believe that the Chinese nation and the Jewish nation, two great nations that have made remarkable contributions to human civilization, will be able to make new contributions to world peace and development: (Holley 1992).

The Chinese minister even pledged its influence to bridge the gaps between the Arab countries and Israel since his country finally got the opportunity to participate in multinational conference.

### Post-Normalisation

Normalisation of diplomatic ties gave an opportunity to China to reposition itself in the West Asian affairs. As Kumaraswamy mentioned, “For Israel, open relations have ended nearly 50 years of nebulous ties, setting Israel on a course to develop its political and economic interests abroad and to improve its strategic capabilities in the region” (Kumaraswamy 2005b: 3). Due to the contacts established during their non-

relations period, particularly between late 1970s and late 1980s, both had reached a significant level of understanding and this laid the organisational infrastructure, created networks of personal contacts, gathered good deal of information and experience about one another's political systems and norms of behaviour (Shichor 1994: 204).

The establishment of diplomatic ties did not result into Israel disclosing its arms sales to China. The secretive nature of this cooperation continued to remain. Owing to the changing international political systems with the demise of the USSR, the US started to raise concerns over Sino-Israeli military ties and began to see China as a potential threat. A couple of months after the diplomatic breakthrough, Israel was accused of allegedly retransferring US-origin military technology (Patriot missile system) to China (Kumaraswamy 1996a). This came in contrast to the Cold War calculations of the US, that is, to support China's military modernisation as a counterweight to the Soviet influence.

Notwithstanding the US criticisms, Israel remained adamant to its policies of selling arms to any country to fund the defence production programmes of its industries. Moshe Arens defended his country's right to sell weapons to any country it chose to, including China. He denied the allegations of technology re-export. In his words,

Nobody should be surprised that Israel sells some of the products of its defence industry to a number of countries, including China. China is not a country in a state of war with Israel, but other countries, including the United States, for that matter, are selling weapons to countries that are in a state of war with Israel, who've gone to war against Israel in the past and who may go to war against Israel in the future (Kempster 1992).

Arms sales to China, which contributed to normalisation, became a major irritant in Israel-US relations. Describing the salience of this tactic, a scholar was of the view that, "Ever since its first exports in the early 1950s, arms sales have become Israel's most successful foreign policy too. Through careful and operations, it has employed this method to establish new relations, strengthen existing ties, and renew old ones" (Kumaraswamy 1994b: 37).

In 1993, the criticism over arms exports to China increased when the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) R. James Woolsey talked about the "several billion

dollars” arms trade between Israel and China (Gordon 1993b). He mentioned the decade-long clandestine military cooperation and identified jet fighters, air-to-air missiles and tanks to be some of the items that were sold to China. In October that year, Rabin said that Israel sold arms to China but he considered the US accusation as “total nonsense”, and he said, “we... sold a little bit over \$60 million (of goods) last year and this year” (Los Angeles Times 1993). This was the first instance when an Israeli leader confirmed arms exports to China. The military cooperation did not take the usual pattern after the establishment of diplomatic relations as it was marred by various controversies, and this happened due to the third party intervention, namely the US.

It is appropriate to say that the tactic of using arms sales as a means to promote foreign relations became significant as it facilitated Israel’s establishment of diplomatic ties with China. The strengthening of political relations was marked by high-level visits from both the countries. In September 1992, Qian Qichen visited Israel, and this was the time when the latter “acceded to China’s demands and withdrew an offer to sell Kfir jetfighters to Taiwan” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1992). Presidents Chaim Herzog and Ezer Weizman visited China in December 1992 and April 1999, respectively (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000a). Similarly, Prime Ministers Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu visited Beijing in October 1993 and May 1998, respectively. For the first time, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Israel in April 2000 (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000b). Apart from these visits, in 1998, Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai visited and his Chinese counterpart, Chi Haotian, reciprocated in October 1999 (Gee 2000).

During these visits, both the countries agreed to build their ties more firmly in various fields such as business, politics, education and culture, agricultural and economic cooperation. However, the military component which played a crucial role before normalisation was conspicuous by its absence after 1992. Israel was pressurised by the US to halt its arms exports to China, although it could sell a few items such as Python-3 missiles and Harpy drones after normalisation (SIPRI). Despite these sales, the period throughout the 1990s was marked by various allegations of re-exporting military technology to China without prior permission from the US. In fact, scrutiny on Israeli arms sales began before 1992. The US changed its outlook towards China

and increasingly became concerned over the latter's military build up. Israel, which received the largest annual military aid from the US, did not have much leverage to withstand the pressure from its benefactor. Under such circumstance, the hope that Israel would be a great window of opportunity for China or rather an asset to be utilised as a channel to the US crumbled. This was one of the most important cases where its arms exports were successfully scuttled, and this intervening role of the US is addressed in Chapter Six.

## Chapter Four

### Military Relations with South Africa

The depth of Israel-South Africa military relations has to be located within the context of Israel's prolonged relations with the Sub-Saharan African nations and their causes, course of that relationship and its consequences. Decolonized Africa was an important region where Israel shared its technical skills in areas such as agriculture and primary healthcare (Kreinin 1976: 54-68). Both sides enjoyed a cordial relationship until the June War when the political climate in West Asia forced the African countries to re-examine their friendship with Israel and move closer to the Arab countries. The emergence of decolonised and newly-independent states had resulted in Israel adopting a strong "policy in keeping with Afro-Asian aspirations for economic development and modernisation" (Reich 2004: 131). With an aim of forging friendly relations with them and to benefit from their support, the Jewish State began to focus on multifaceted programmes such as technical assistance, training programmes, joint-economic enterprises, trade, etc.

Historically, there was no significant Israeli presence in the Sub-Saharan Africa until the late 1950s (Ojo 1988: 7) even though two of the earliest African countries were helpful in the creation of Israel, namely, Ethiopia (Reich 2004: 131) and Liberia, both of whom had a significant Black Jewish population. The well-being of the Jewish population anywhere in the world has always figured prominently in Israel's foreign policy objectives and the quest for security and friendship with the African countries became added objectives. Scholar like Bernard Reich felt that Israel's overtures towards the emerging Africa were mainly due to "self-interest and altruism" and also because of "practical and ideological considerations" (Reich 1964: 20). This was primarily due to its realisation of the growing importance of various African countries. He further went on to add that securing their support for its conflict with the Arabs was an immediate and additional incentive. On an ideological note, as explained by one,

Israel felt a sense of identification and partnership of fate with the Africans. The Jewish people, long the victims of racial discrimination, contempt, and humiliations, felt an affinity for the African peoples,

who had suffered racial discrimination, humiliations, and impoverishment (Oded 2010: 125).

There were also specific developments that triggered the rapprochement between the two sides since the late 1950s. The most important was Israel's exclusion from the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in April 1955 (Kohn 1959: 98) and, the Second International Socialist Conference in New Delhi, in 1956 (Nadelman 1981: 186). These exclusions, primarily due to Arab pressures, had an adverse impact on Israel's standing in the international community (Bard 1988/89: 22). The neighbouring Arab states detested its existence and Israel faced "vitriolic condemnations by the Soviet bloc countries, and sometimes even unsure of the support of the United States" (Ojo 1988:8).

Israel, as a result, wanted to move out of the emerging diplomatic isolation and sought acceptance by the Third World countries, particularly in Africa (Rivkin 1959: 486). In the words of one,

Israel's quest for an international mission had to await the normalisation of the power-status in the Middle East and the recession of the Arab threat, both apparent in the years following the Sinai campaign. The Sinai campaign provided the needed opportunities to open to Africa... That itself heightened the importance of Africa in the perception of Israeli leaders (Ojo 1988: 8).

The importance Israel attached to Africa served two main functions: firstly, reaching out to these nations would strengthen its standing in the region in the face of the rising Arab influence, and any moves by the African states to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel would counter Arab antagonism. Secondly, there was an economic incentive and trade with Africa could expand the market for its exports thereby enabling Israel to secure raw materials for its nascent industries; in short, it was a marriage between of Israel's needs for such materials and African demand for technical skills. Moreover, many African countries were sympathetic towards the plight of the Jewish people and Israeli leaders had made contacts with Africa through socialist and labour movements (Ibid.).

Israel did not take much time to recognize the process of decolonization of Africa and sought diplomatic relations with the newly-independent states. It exchanged ambassadors with Liberia in August 1957 and opened a consulate in Addis Ababa in



1956 even though Ethiopia granted *de jure* recognition only in October 1961. Following these moves, countries such as Ghana, Zaire, Mali, Sierra Leone, Madagascar and Nigeria established ties with Israel between 1960 and 1961. By 1972, it had diplomatic ties as many as 32 African states with the only exceptions among the Sub-Saharan Africa being Somalia and Mauritania, both members of the Arab League (Peters 1992: 2). On the eve of the October War, Israel had one of the largest diplomatic networks in Africa.

Reciprocating these efforts, many African states opened embassies and resident missions in Israel, and indeed missions of countries like Central African Republic, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Madagascar, Niger, Congo, Upper Volta and Zaire were located in Jerusalem than in Tel Aviv. According to Joel Peters, “recognition of Israel’s claim to Jerusalem was an indication of the friendship and the level of support that many African states were prepared to demonstrate for Israel” (Peters 1992: 2). Furthermore, Ethiopia did not open an embassy in Israel until 17 December 1989 but maintained a consulate in Jerusalem that was opened in 1956.

From the late 1950s, meetings between Israeli and African leaders became frequent. In early 1958, Foreign Minister Golda Meir visited Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana and the Ivory Coast; in 1962, President Yitzhak Ben Zvi undertook a five-nation West African tour; and in 1964, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol paid visits to Senegal, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Zaire, Uganda and Liberia (Ibid: 3). These visits highlighted the importance Israel attached to Africa and as a result, received several requests for technical assistance (Kreinin 1976: 54-68). By providing technical assistance in the socio-economic development of African countries, it sought to expand its diplomatic presence and garner support.

However, the October War and the oil crisis cost Israel dearly as all the African nations except Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland broke off diplomatic relations with Israel (MERIP 1973: 16; Issawi 1978-79). This volte face was the result of efforts by Arab countries from the late 1960s towards Israel’s politico-diplomatic isolation in Africa through “more aggressive and sophisticated way” (Oded 2010: 133). The oil crisis and the resultant wealth acquired by Arab oil exporting country increased the

economic and political clout of the Arabs and Israel's isolation in Africa became inevitable.

At the same time, since the normalisation of relations, Israel forged and maintained close military relations with African countries and some of these relations continued despite the 1973 upheavals.

#### Military Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa

Apart from Latin America and the new states in Asia (Abadi 2004), Israel provided military-related assistance to Africa that included a host of services. A significant portion of this relationship was commercial and involved arms exports. Some were arms supplies whereby Israel supplied weapons and systems that were no longer used by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) or were in excess (Curtis 1985: 6). Israel also trained pilots, military and police officers and paramilitary forces as well as youth organisations and in some cases it offered military training to individuals who were "influential or potentially influential" (Bard 1988/89: 23); General of Congolese Army Mobutu Sese Seko (later President of Zaire) and Idi Amin (later President of Uganda) are prominent examples.

Explaining the strategic interests in Africa, former Israeli diplomat Arye Oded observed:

The Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia and Eritrea, is geographically close to Israel and Red Sea and its outlet, Bab al-Mandab that are of special importance in assuring maritime passage and air routes to Eastern and Southern Africa. Kenya and Uganda border Arab countries and Israel's presence there has security importance. Mombasa, the port of Kenya, and Dar al-Salaam, the port of Tanzania, are important for Israeli cargo and passenger ships on their way to the Far East and Southern Africa (Oded 2010: 124).

As the African continent has sizeable Muslim population, Israel hoped that cooperation with these countries would assuage its tensions with the wider Islamic world. As highlighted in Chapter Two, arms sales diplomacy was used by Israel to promote its foreign policy objectives. Irrespective of the nature of the regime in the recipient countries, Israel's readiness to transfer its arms was driven by political considerations, economic interests, interests of the Jewish citizens in those countries and/or security calculations. Moreover, foreign currencies earned through such sales

supported its defence research and development (R&D) programmes in maintaining a military edge over its adversaries.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Israel had begun its search for military clients and willing to sell aircrafts, naval vessels, armoured and non-armoured vehicles, missiles and rockets, artillery, infantry weapons, uniforms, military communications, electronic equipments and spare parts (Klieman 1985: 123-124). Military-related services and know-how were also supplied and in pursuing this Israel did not restrict its services to any particular client or region. According to Aharon Klieman,

There is likely to be a Jewish factor, whether because in some instances there may be a resident Jewish community toward whose physical well-being Israel is most sensitive, or because the purchaser country perceives its ties with Israel as the key to the influential American Jewish community and thus as a way to create a favourable climate and image for its standing with the United States (Klieman 1984: 41).

He cited the example of Zaire and the similarity of diplomatic isolation faced by both during the 1960s that resulted in them maintaining a patron-client relationship.

Another reason for Israel's inroad into Africa was the prevailing "revolutionary changes" and politics in the continent (Klieman, 1985: 138). Israel's arms sales were mainly driven by political and foreign policy objectives and economic incentives (Reiser 1989: 70). As a result, it had begun using various instructional and training programmes to entice political support and explore potential defence markets of the newly-formed states in Africa. The foreign currency earned from arms sales to the developing world in 1967, for example, was estimated at US\$30 million (Reiser 1989: 67).

Israel's military sales to and security cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa had a distinct pattern. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations, countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zaire, etc, received some forms of military supplies or other assistance. The October War witnessed a sudden reversal of Israel's diplomatic presence in Africa but the implementation of the Egypt-Israel Camp David Agreement and withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula brought about a shift in the stance of some countries. The failure of the oil-rich Arab countries to fulfil the expectations of African countries in terms of financial aid and assistance

resulted in some of them re-examining their policy of isolating Israel. The interventionist approach of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in the Africa and Israel initiating sanctions against the *apartheid* regime in South Africa in 1987 also contributed to the change (Oded 1986: 2-4, Oded 2010: 137-138).

Even though between 15 to 17 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa forged some form of military-security relations with Israel, six countries are prominent, namely, Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Zaire, Kenya and South Africa. There were other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which benefited militarily from Israel, but the latter's military ties with these six countries were prominent. These ties were comprehensive in nature as Israel not only sold arms but also provided other technical assistance including cooperation in military intelligence. Israel received heightened importance for its training of African military personnel in all the three sectors, that is, army, navy and air force. These six countries benefited from the military ties but like others most of them had succumbed to the pressure from the Arab countries in the wake of the oil crisis and anticipated economic benefits from oil-rich Arab countries. However, a few of them resumed cooperation with Israel and Kenya and Ethiopia are two good examples.

An important trait that sustained a robust military cooperation was the prevalence of direct military rule, single-party political order, or the presence of strong leaders. Under such circumstances, it became easier for Israel to forge military-security relations. Scholars like Klieman were of the view that forging military or pro-arms coalition became an important foreign policy agenda for Israel, and arms sales played an important role (Klieman 1984: 3-9). Ghana, under the leadership of President Kwame Nkrumah, maintained strong military ties with Israel and it became important primarily due to the prominence of Nkrumah and other African nations (Gitelson 1980: 98, Kreinin 1976: 55). Similarly, military relations between Israel and Uganda were significant during the rule of President Milton Obote and the robust relationship deteriorated after the military coup staged by Idi Amin in January 1971. Even though Amin visited Israel in the same year, the relations did not endure. Differences over the crisis in Tanzania which was friendly with Israel and latter's refusal to supply fighter jets widened Israeli-Ugandan differences (Oded 2006:3-4). On 30 March 1972 Uganda became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to break off relations with Israel, long before the October War and the oil crisis.

The prevalence of military-led governments facilitated closer ties with Israel as the case in Kenya, Ethiopia and Zaire. From the time the Sub-Saharan countries became independent to 1966, 26 states witnessed some form of military intervention (Jacob 1971: 169) and many of their leaders promoted military-security cooperation with Israel. Kenya's military-intelligence ties with Israel were strong under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, and the cooperation preceded establishment of diplomatic relations in 1963 (Naim 2005, Mogire 2008: 566). The hijacking of the French aircraft to Entebbe in 1976 and the subsequent Israeli rescue operation further strengthened the military ties between them (Butime 2014: 86, Ojo 1988: 73).

Similar military cooperation was witnessed with Zaire during the regime of Mobuto Sese Seko (Klieman 1985:35) and with Ethiopia under Haile Selassie (Guzansky 2014, Alpher 2013: 1-4). The prevailing geopolitical and geostrategic scenarios during the 1960s promoted the military relations with Israel (Bard 1988/89: 24; Maddy-Weitzman 1996: 36). The military cooperation was marked by high-level visits, including that of the Defence Minister Ezer Weizman (1979), Director General of the Foreign Ministry David Kimche (May 1981) and Defence Minister Ariel Sharon (November 1981). In most of these visits, military intelligence agencies played important roles (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 60; Naim 2005; Mogire 2008: 566).

Israel was instrumental in establishing the military in these countries and offered them training and other facilities. It trained the paratroopers of Ghana, Zaire and Uganda (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 49, J. Coleman Kitchen 1983: 1). Similar assistance was also provided to elite Ethiopian troops and commandoes for border patrols and counterinsurgency. Most of the presidential bodyguards of these countries, and particularly Zaire, received training from Israel (Oded 1986: 14). In some cases, it also helped in setting up navy, flying school and academy for army officers, of which Ghana is a good example (Peters 1992:7, JTA 1959b, Ojo 1988: 21). In terms of area of cooperation, beyond training, upgrading of air force has been a prominent feature of the military relations. Many Ugandan, Kenyan and Ghanaian pilots, and members of their intelligence services were trained by Israel (Stapleton 2013: 89, Oded 2006; Jacob 1971: 170, Levey 2004: 78). Military communication systems, both on the ground and in aviation sectors, were set up with the help of its expertise (Ojo 1988: 22).

Apart from the above-mentioned type of military relations, arms trade was prominent. Some of the items sold by Israel to these countries included 120 mm mortars, training and transport planes and M-4 Sherman tanks (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 61). Countries such as Ethiopia received spare parts for American-made F-5 aircraft along with napalm and anti-fired missiles (Bishku 1994: 49), bombs and ammunitions (Klieman 1985: 141). Weapons captured from the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) during its 1982 Lebanese invasion (Shipler 1983) and systems, such as M-4 tanks (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 55) which were no longer used by the IDF army were sold and Zaire was one of the beneficiaries. T-54 tanks were another popular items sold to this country (Reiser 1989: 209). In 1994, both these countries clinched arms deals worth US\$50 million (Marshall 1997: 24). Other items delivered by Israel were Galil, Uzi, M-16, Kalashnikov rifles, tents, rifles and artillery shells (Klieman 1985: 140). Kenya purchased arms worth millions of dollar from Israel between 1964 and 1967 (Ojo 1988: 21). During their clandestine cooperation, Israel agreed to sell two missile boats and 48 Gabriel Missiles, as well as field kitchens, airplane maintenance equipments, and related military gears (Klieman 1984: 22). Along with fire-fighting equipments, Ghana received reconditioned military aircrafts (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 49).

Sub-Saharan African countries' military ties were partly driven by a sense of postcolonial insecurities, unresolved border disputes as well as by "ethnic irredentism" (Klieman 1985: 138). Factors such as economic stagnation, political fragmentation, military imbalance vis-à-vis neighbours, erosion of regional norms and arms race were also crucial (Ibid: 139). Further, some faced threats from Arab countries and leaders, particularly Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and this influenced them to befriend Israel. At least until 1973, a number of Sub-Saharan African countries had shared security concerns vis-à-vis their immediate neighbours. As a result, these countries relied heavily on Israel and some of them even maintained and furthered their military cooperation even after the severance of diplomatic ties in the wake of the October War.

**Table 4-1:** Severance, Renewal and Establishment of New Relations

	<b>Country</b>	<b>Date and Year</b>	<b>Date and Year of Renewal/Establishment</b>
1	Guinea	6 June 1967	--
2	Uganda	30 March 1972	26 July 1994, Renewal
3	Chad	28 November 1972	--
4	Congo	31 December 1972	14 July 1991
5	Niger	5 January 1973	--
6	Mali	5 January 1973	--
7	Burundi	16 May 1973	1 March, Renewal
8	Togo	21 September 1972	9 June 1987, Renewal
9	Zaire	4 October 1973	12 May 1982, Renewal
10	Rwanda	8 October 1973	10 October 1994, Renewal
11	Benin	9 October 1973	17 July 1992, Renewal
12	Burkina Faso	10 October 1973	4 October 1993, Renewal
13	Cameroon	13 October 1973	26 August 1986, Renewal
14	Equatorial Guinea	14 October 1973	5 December 1993, Renewal
15	Tanzania	19 October 1973	24 February 1995, Renewal
16	Madagascar	20 October 1973	27 January 1994, Renewal
17	Central African Republic	21 October 1973	16 January 1989, Renewal
18	Ethiopia	23 October 1973	3 November 1989, Renewal
19	Nigeria	25 October 1973	4 May 1992, Renewal
20	Gambia	26 October 1973	14 September 1992, Renewal
21	Zambia	26 October 1973	25 December 1991, Renewal
22	Sierra Leone	27 October 1973	27 May 1992, Renewal
23	Ghana	28 October 1973	9 August 1994, Renewal
24	Senegal	28 October 1973	4 August 1994, Renewal
25	Gabon	29 October 1973	29 September 1993, Renewal
26	Kenya	1 November 1973	23 December 1988, Renewal
27	Liberia	2 November 1973	13 August 1983, Renewal

28	Cote d'Ivoire	8 November 1973	16 December 1985, Renewal
29	Botswana	12 November 1973	7 December 1993, Renewal
30	Mauritius	15 June 1976	29 September 1993, Renewal
31	Seychelles Is.	--	30 June 1992, Establishment
32	Egypt	--	26 March 1979, Establishment
33	Angola	--	16 April 1992, Establishment
34	Eritrea	--	25 May 1993, Establishment
35	Mozambique	--	26 July 1993, Establishment
36	Sao Tome and Principe	--	16 November 1993, Establishment
37	Cape Verde	--	27 July 1994, Establishment
38	Zimbabwe	--	26 November 1993 Establishment
39	Guinea-Bissau	--	10 March 1994, Establishment
40	Namibia	--	21 January 1994, Establishment

Source: Oded 2010: 140-141

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a significant shift in Africa's views towards Israel brought about by a host of developments. The Camp David agreement, Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in April 1982, and disappointment over Arab aid and assistance contributed to this improvement. As Susan Aurelia Gitelson aptly puts it:

The future of Israeli-African relations depends mainly upon the resolution of the Middle East impasse. If a peace settlement is not reached soon, it will be difficult to repair Israel's relations with African states. If a settlement, including agreement on the territories, is accepted, it will be possible for African states which broke relations under pressure to endeavour to renew ties with Israel... Just as war was the catalyst for breaking relations, peace can be the condition for resumption (Gitelson 1976: 198-199).

African states recognized that by remaining neutral to the Arab-Israeli conflict, they could play a "role in bringing peace to the Middle East" (Oded 1986: 10). Hence,



some of these countries which joined the Arab-initiated political isolation of Israel in the wake of the October war, gradually reversed their policies and began re-establish ties after the Sinai withdrawal (Oded 2010: 141). **Table 4-1** gives the date and year of the suspension of diplomatic ties by the Sub-Saharan African ties, and renewal and establishment of new relations.

Interestingly, the resumption of ties did not see any significant enhancement in military-security cooperation even though countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Cameroon received some military assistance. The removal of military rulers and the onset of a democratization process across the continent led to lessening of regional tensions in Africa which in turn reduced their dependence upon security cooperation with Israel. For its part, Israel “became aware that the military assistance was accompanied by negative incidents that harmed its image, portraying Israel as a supporter of militarisation and several undemocratic regimes” (Oded 2010: 138). This coincided with the period when Israel and the Arab countries began to negotiate after the 1991 Madrid conference, which also resulted in the normalisation of relations with China and India. Against this backdrop the following section discusses Israel’s military relations with South Africa until the end of *apartheid* in 1994.

### Israel-South Africa Relations

Writing on the nature of the relations between the two countries, Benjamin M. Joseph observed:

South Africa’s military strategy has been developed with the help of Israeli officers, her armed forces are equipped by Israel, and their counterinsurgency tactics have evolved almost entirely as a result of the lessons learned by the Israelis in their fight against the Palestine Liberation organisation (Joseph 1988: 43).

The military relations that began in the 1960s have been controversial. On many occasions, Israel had been castigated for its ties with South Africa particularly its military relations which were seen as the principal force behind the survival of the *apartheid* regime (Peters 1992: 147). While Israel pursued arms sales diplomacy with the *apartheid* regime, the latter was also helpful in providing key strategic minerals.

Bilateral relations between the two could be divided into two phases. In the first phase between 1948 and early 1960s both struggled to establish relations and faced setbacks due to racism. The second period, from the mid-1960s to early 1990s, was dominated by the military dimension. The latter phase, the principal focus of this research, was the phase when Israel adopted arms sales diplomacy to gain recognition and to overcome the void created by the loss of once-friendly Sub-Saharan African nations, and its lucrative clients such as Iran after the Islamic Revolution.

Historically, South Africa supported the Zionist movement even before the formation of Israel (Stevens 1971, Shimoni 1980) and on 29 November 1947 it voted in favour of the partition resolution in the United Nations (UN). In May 1949, it granted *de jure* recognition and Israel opened its consulate-general in Pretoria in 1949 which later became a legation in November 1950 (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 110). South Africa was reluctant to reciprocate as it felt consular relations would be an “unnecessary step because its interests would be handled by the British as part of South Africa’s commonwealth ties” (Cefkin 1988/89: 34). The delay was primarily due to Pretoria’s fear of alienation from the Arabs which eventually opened its consulate in Israel only in March 1972.

However, the prolonged absence of a resident South African mission in Israel did not prevent both countries from active diplomatic engagement. In May 1950 Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett became the first Israeli leader to visit South Africa and this was followed by Prime Minister Daniel F. Malan’s visit to Israel in September 1953 (JTA 1953). Despite these visits, during the 1950s, relations were not eventful mainly due to Israel’s open criticisms of *apartheid* rule and its efforts to engage with post-colonial African states (McGreal 2006).

Furthermore, it did not wish to upset the Sub-Saharan African states which were very critical of the *apartheid* regime. Hence, it mounted an active campaign of offering aid to Africa in agriculture, joint commercial ventures, and military assistance. As discussed earlier, military and quasi-military programmes made considerable imprint and became an integral part of its overall foreign policy (Jacob 1971: 165). Increasing its denunciations of *apartheid*, in 1961 Israel joined an anti-*apartheid* initiative in the UN. In a joint-statement issued in Jerusalem during the visit of the

President of Upper Volta Maurice Yamengo, *apartheid* was denounced for being “disadvantageous to the non-white minority in the land” (Peters 1992: 148). In October of that year, Israel voted in the UN against the speech delivered by South Africa’s Foreign Minister Eric Louw in the General Assembly, wherein he defended *apartheid* (Joseph 1988: 11). In November, Israel was “directed” by the African states to support the General Assembly resolution 1598 (XV) that described *apartheid* as “reprehensible and repugnant to the dignity and rights of peoples and individuals” (United Nations General Assembly 1961:5, Stevens 1971: 134).

Golda Meir, who was the Israeli foreign minister at the time, vehemently opposed *apartheid* and “is said to have pledged not to set foot in South Africa for as long as *apartheid* existed” (Joseph 1988: 11). Scholar like Sasha Polakow-Suransky described Meir’s attitude towards *apartheid* in the following words:

Meir’s strong line against *apartheid* was driven both by strategic considerations and by principle, and she was not afraid to publicly denounced South Africa’s movement. In 1963, Meir told the U.N. General Assembly that Israelis could not condone *apartheid* due to Jews’ historical experience as victims of oppression and went on to pledge that Israel had “taken all necessary steps” to prevent Israeli arms from reaching South Africa, directly or indirectly (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 32).

Meir’s five visits to African countries as foreign minister (June 1956-January 1966) and prime minister (March 1969-June 1974) was indicative of her fondness for the region. Her reputation of being a leader who strongly criticised and condemned colonialism and racialism was widely appreciated among the newly-developed countries in Africa (Oded 2010: 126). As a result, little importance to ties with South Africa became logical and inevitable.

In November 1962 pro-government South African daily newspaper, *Die Transvaaler*, severely criticised Israel for voting in favour of the General Assembly Resolution 1961 that condemned the racial policies of the *apartheid* regime (United Nations General Assembly 1962: 9-10, JTA 1962a). It called for scaling down relations with Israel, restriction on Israeli national carrier El Al, and reduction in trade. Subsequently, in September 1963, Israel recalled head of its mission Simha Pratt in Pretoria, and downgraded relations to the consular level handled by charge d’affaires (JTA 1963). Denouncing the move, South Africa’s Prime Minister Hendrik F.

Voerwoerd said, “The present Government of Israel need not seek help from South Africa, when their day of need arises. I can do nothing but deprecate this action” and added: “It would be unfair to take revenge on them for what others have done to South Africa, for the Jews of South Africa suffer most for this. Jews of South Africa are citizens of this country. They have shown how they regret and deprecate this act by Israel” (JTA 1963).

The impact of the tensions was felt on their economic and commercial relations. South Africa withdrew concessions that were granted to its Jewish citizens during the early 1960s whereby the latter could transfer money to Israel (Peters 1992: 149). Bilateral trade was drastically reduced. Voerwoerd hinted that a situation could arise when South Africa’s help would be sought. The late 1960s witnessed two overlapping trends. While a number of Sub-Saharan states drifted away from Israel, South Africa and Israel moved towards reconciliation. The June War sowed the seeds for bitterness between Israel and African states leading to a complete breakdown after the October War. A few other factors, as identified by Gitelson include the following:

... Decreasing political interest of the major powers in Africa, reflected in lessened financial assistance, increasing flow of Arab oil money to Africa, especially to countries with significant Muslim populations, and growing radicalisation of various African leaders and countries, combined to make Israel’s position on the continent more difficult... (Gitelson 1976: 1987).

Oil-rich Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Libya showed an interest in Africa, especially in economic and religious areas and began providing financial aid to countries such as Chad and Niger (Gitelson 1974:11).

Nasser sought to bring African states and Arab countries together. In the words of Ethan A. Nadelman:

However, his [Nasser] prominence in the Third World, his revolutionary stance, his diplomatic victory over the colonial powers at Suez, his strong advocacy of African interests, and his efforts to assist in Africa’s development, increasingly reaped dividends as the 1960s drew to a close. Egypt took the lead in strengthening links between the Arab League and Africa, signing economic agreements which led to the establishment, for example, of the African Common Market, the African Developments, and the Arab-African Bank, and sponsoring numerous conferences aimed at improving African and Afro-Asian economic co-operation to the exclusion of Israel. Egypt also initiated Arab efforts to expand trade with Black Africa, and provided technical

and cultural aid to at least 26 African states (Nadelman 1981: 205-206).

The June War changed African states' perception of Israel to that of an occupying power encroaching upon an African territory, that is, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula (Levey 2008: 207, Gitelson 1974).

Around the same period, Israel and South Africa faced similar problems. They felt threatened by their hostile neighbours; Arabs in case of Israel and anti-white militants of Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), and Angola in the South African case. The growing militancy in the respective region was a compelling reason for both to cooperate militarily. Both sought to fight their isolation within their respective regions. Indeed, it was a convergence of interest between Israel's need for partners beyond its region and South Africa's need for military technologies.

Following the June War, both began a slow process of reconciliation as the war had elicited "a strong response of solidarity with Israel not only among South African Jews but also among the entire South African population" (Ojo 1988: 117). The *apartheid* regime was inspired by Israel's stunning triumph during this war and as a demonstration of its intention; it permitted its Jewish citizens to transfer a sum of US\$20.5 million (Hunter 1987a: 25). Many South African Jews and non-Jews showed solidarity and became the first ones to offer aid to Israel in non-combatant duties with volunteers from South Africa (JTA 1967b).

The South African willingness to aid Israel during this crisis reflected its changing economic and political interest at a time when other African countries intensified their pressures to isolate the *apartheid* regime. This had led to visible improvement of relations with Israel. The economic interest behind warming up of relations was due to increasing calls for sanctions against South Africa. Scholars argued that "Pretoria's policies have become, more than ever, a matter of worldwide distress with numerous countries adopting sanctions and requiring disinvestment as an expression of their animosity toward the South African social and political order" (Cefkin 1988/89: 29). As the economic ties bloomed, Israel's exports to South Africa increased from US\$4 million in 1967 to US\$48 million in 1979, while the imports grew from US\$3.54 million to US\$53 million during the same period (Husain 1982: 70).

## Military Cooperation

Israel's military cooperation with the *apartheid* regime was one of the most closely-guarded affairs. Till the mid-1960s, relations between these two countries were less than cordial. As observed by Sasha Polakow-Suransky, "In the 1960s, Israeli leaders' ideological hostility toward *apartheid* kept two nations apart. During these years, Israel took a strong and unequivocal stance against South Africa" (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 5). The increasing isolation faced by both of them from the latter part of 1960s laid the foundation for cooperation in military-security arenas. It was national interests and existence in hostile environments which brought them closer.

Both the countries had faced arm embargoes during the 1960s and this increased their vulnerabilities against the Soviet-backed armed oppositions. Under such circumstances, neither Israel nor South Africa had any reliable arms supplier. Thereafter, threat perceptions from across their borders increased. In South Africa, due to the rising anti-*apartheid* activities, sanction on arms sales was imposed through a resolution passed at the UN Security Council (UNSC) on 7 August 1963 (United Nations Security Council 1963: 7). Similarly, France imposed an arm embargo on Israel following the June War. These restrictions on the shipments of military items, mostly fighter jet, curbed their military capabilities. At the same time, Arab country such as Egypt was militarily equipped by the USSR (Reiser 1989: 84-85). Likewise, militants in Zimbabwe and movements in Angola received Soviet backings (Thom 1974).

The alliance between South Africa and Israel is symbiotic in many areas of military endeavours, with Israel usually the more vital element. Israel is South Africa's closest military ally and its source for inspiration and technology (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 116).

South Africa's vast reserves of natural resources, particularly uranium, attracted Israel. The cooperation in the development of nuclear missile technology is highlighted later in this chapter.

Considering the threats from their regional adversaries, Israel and South Africa began to undertake defence indigenisation programmes from the late 1960s. It became timely for the former as it was looking for clients to export its weapons systems to fund R&D programmes. The *apartheid* regime was looking for sources to import arms, and Israel, by then, had already begun to produce some of the sophisticated

weapon systems including electronic warfare systems, aircrafts, missiles, subsystems and small arms. These products were appreciated and it was the missile systems which caught the attention of the South African defence planners. As highlighted in Chapter Two, the possession of Soviet-made ship-to-ship missiles by Egypt during the mid-1950s and 1960s triggered missile development programmes in Israel. This led to the birth of advanced systems such as Gabriel missiles (Reiser 1989: 191-192).

Rafael and Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) carved its niche in the productions of various types of missiles. The factor that triggered the need to develop sea-to-sea missile was described by Stewart Reiser in the following words:

Until 1962 the Skory [class destroyer acquired from the Soviet Union] was Egypt's major naval unit in service, and its guns easily outranged the 4.5-in.guns on board Israel's two Z-class destroyers. Rafael had designed the sea-to-sea missile with a 20-km range as well as good capacity for striking a destroyer-sized target. However, in 1962 Egypt received its first Komar missile boat armed with Styx missiles from the Soviet Union, and this rendered Israel's sea defence plan totally obsolete. In the face of these events, the sea-to-sea missile project immediately became a top priority for Israel (Ibid: 63).

This coincided with South Africa's programme on the development of short-range tactical missiles, which began from mid-1960s.

A couple of factors improved relationship between Israel and South Africa. First was the strong sense of nationhood preserved by both which was threatened by a hostile environment. Israel is geographically small with scant material assets but possessed a high degree of sophistication in arms technology. This gave Israel an opportunity to enhance its arms supply to South Africa which had vast interior natural resources lacked defence relations. Secondly, both were outcaste states in the face of adversity (Klieman 1985: 153). The simultaneous arms embargoes faced by both Israel and South Africa also encouraged the development of indigenous arms making capabilities. It was the convergence of capabilities exhibited by both, that is, contribution of funding and materials by Pretoria and that of scientific know-how and experience by Israel that made the relationship based on arms diplomacy an immense success.

## Contours of the Relationship

Although military relations between the two countries were low-key between 1948 and 1967, they picked up after the October War. By the late 1970, South Africa alone consumed a major share of Israel's arms exports. It was not only arms trade that they concentrated upon but cooperated in the field of air force, naval warfare, counterterrorism, border management, intelligence sharing, and nuclear technology. The following section highlights the nature of their military cooperation.

### a. Arms Trade

As France imposed an arms embargo against Israel following the June War, South Africa came to its rescue by supplying crucial spare parts for the French-made Mirage. This led to the formation of Israel-South Africa Friendship League in 1968. Scholar like Naomi Chazan observed that since then “the two so-called garrison states have developed a small, though heterogeneous, set of military interchanges” (Chazan 1983: 186). Initially, military cooperation was mainly concentrated on exchange of materials as South Africa had the licence to manufacture Uzi sub-machinegun through Belgium (Adams 1984: 32). On a note of reciprocity, South Africa began selling its tanks in January 1970 and this marked “a new stage of their cooperation” and “the South African tank is a 65-ton giant, armed with a heavy gun and designed according to the model of the British new tank” (JTA 1970).

In the wake of the June War, both realised the need to establish arms trade especially due to similarities in their security threats. While it had substantial stock of Mirage spares, especially engines, South Africa wanted to benefit from the military tactics of the IDF (Adams 1984: 34). In October 1967, during the visit of the deputy director and chief engineer of IAI to South Africa, both the countries discussed the possibilities of co-production of fighter-jet (Ibid.).

While discussing the military relations, their connection to France cannot be ignored and mid-1960s witnessed an intense military cooperation between France and South Africa (Moukambi 2008: 70-118). Given the increasingly opposition to the *apartheid* regime, Pretoria foresaw an inevitable Western arms embargo which spurred the development of an indigenous defence industry even while looking for other partners (Adams 1984: 30). Israel, which at the time faced French arms embargo, took up the



opportunity to warm up to South Africa. As a result, in early 1968, defence officials from both the countries who were in France discussed sharing models for new weapons systems (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 53). Israel offered technical information about Mirage aircrafts, as the embargo strained its relations with France; it resulted in becoming closer to Pretoria. The presence of pro-Israeli arms agents in the French arms defence industry also contributed to enhancement of Israel-South Africa defence ties. A few French middlemen negotiated with South Africa to purchase Dassault-made Mirage fighters which, in turn, could be re-exported to Israel (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 57-58).

The timing of military cooperation became favourable to Israel. After the French embargo, Israel initiated indigenisation of its arms industry and began producing items such as aircraft, tanks, naval crafts, tactical and strategic missiles, electronics and other subsystems. Military items and technologies developed during the 1960s and included Gabriel anti-ship missiles, Jericho intermediate-range ballistic missiles, first generation non-conventional capabilities and during the 1970s, they were Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), laser range-finders and designators, Galil assault rifle, Reshef missile boat family, Kfir fighter jet, Merkava tank, Barak surface-to-air missiles and Popeye air-to-ground missile (Sadeh 2001: 6). This endeavour encouraged Israel's urge for qualitative edge over its adversaries. Its diplomatic overtures towards South African coincided with its usage of arms sales to facilitate foreign relations and from about US\$12 million in 1956, its arms sales rose to US\$30 million in 1967 (Reiser 1989: 67).

In January 1969, Yitzhak Ironi, a senior official of the Israel Military Industries (IMI) said that he,

... was not surprised by the extension of the 1967 French embargo on Mirage jets to include spare parts and all other military equipment. We began to tool in May, 1967 and have prepared dies for the most critical items. What we cannot buy abroad we will make ourselves and there is nothing we cannot produce in the way of arms, ammunition and accessories in the next 12 to 18 months (JTA 1969).

A similar view was expressed by Moshe Arens, the head of the IAI and later Defence Minister, who said that the embargo would be a blessing for Israel and could be "fatal to France's aircraft industry" (Ibid.). French President Charles de Gaulle's embargo

thus worked in Israel's favour as the latter decided to start domestic military industry towards meeting its demands. It was this policy that gave rise to the emergence of a number of state-owned enterprises such as IAI, IMI, Rafael, Israel Shipyards Limited (ISL), which comprise a substantial and significant portion of the nation's defence industrial base (Sherman 1997: 34).

With increased political isolation in Africa since the early 1970s, Meir's dream of having an overarching influence in those states began to crumble. This, in turn, had given opportunities to other Israeli leaders such as Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin, who had placed paramount importance to Israel's security and to reach out to South Africa (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 64). Both the countries began a slow-paced cooperation on strategic matters and Israeli political parties such as Labour, began to align themselves with South African *apartheid* regime by breaking away from the vision of Meir (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 73). On the diplomatic front, in March 1972, South Africa opened its Consulate-General in Tel Aviv and appointed Charles Fincham as the Consul-General (JTA 1972).

An important breakthrough in the relations occurred following the outbreak of the October War. When Israel was suddenly attacked by its Arab neighbours, Defence Minister P.W. Botha voiced support, and during the June war, he allowed the South African Jews to transfer funds to Israel. This gesture signalled the renewal of relations between the two and there were suggestions that South Africa sent Mirage jets to aid Israel (Adams 1984: 35).

The October war was a turning point as arms sales diplomacy transformed from that of a "peripheral or secondary position to one of greater centrality" (Klieman 1984: 13). Israel began expanding its arms exports, which was earlier conducted by servicing and refurbishing old stocks and allocated more funds to the defence ministry and a rapid sophistication of arms. In the words of Efraim Inbar:

The Yom Kippur of October 1973 was a watershed event in Israeli political history and in the development of its national security outlook... The shock of the 1973 war discredited the political leadership of the time and ushered in a younger generation of Israeli leaders. This development eventually led to a change in Israel's political system, shift from a hegemonic party to a multiparty system, with two large parties, Labour and Likud, competing for political dominance. The Yom Kippur war also shattered Israel's confidence in

the IDF and caused the fundamentals of Israeli strategic thinking to be questioned... (Inbar 1998: 63).

After the end of the war, Israel was in search of partners with whom it could conduct arms trade. Apart from the diplomatic incentives, there were economic motives aimed at reviving the defence economy and R&D. Both the countries decided to elevate their diplomatic mission to ambassadorial level in June 1974. Followed by the opening of the Israeli embassy in Pretoria June, South Africa opened its embassy in Tel Aviv in November 1975. Enhancement of ambassadorial ties facilitated robust military cooperation and this was marked by frequent visits, especially by personnel from military establishments.

From the mid-1970s, military relations began gaining momentum and an added motivation was the Jewish factor as there were 120,000 Jews in South Africa by 1970 and “a central tenet of Israeli foreign policy has always been a sense of commitment toward world Jewry” (Klieman 1985: 40). Since 1973 the military relations were mainly concentrated on arms sales, intelligence cooperation, technology transfers and nuclear cooperation (Ojo 1988: 128). Soon after the renewal of diplomatic ties, in August 1974 Dayan paid a 20-day visit to South Africa (JTA 1974). In a quick succession, Peres visited in November and pushed for establishing important link between the two. During this visit, his discussions with the South African leaders revolved around their similar problems. As observed by one,

Peres—who routinely denounced *apartheid* in public – went on to stress that this cooperation is based not only on common interests and on the determination to resist equally our enemies, but also on the unshakable foundations of our common hatred of injustice and our refusal to submit to it (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 80).

Further, Peres met Botha in Switzerland in 1975.

Both the governments started biannual meetings of the respective defence ministries and arms industry officials. Israeli Air Force (IAF) officials visited South Africa in January 1975, which was followed by another meeting in March. Cooperation in the field of arms trade pertaining to tanks, missile boats, and joint-development of aircraft engines was discussed and Israel allegedly offered to sell its nuclear-capable Jericho missiles. On 3 April 1975, Peres and Botha signed a security agreement, also known as SECMENT, to monitor and enhance defence cooperation between the two

countries (Ibid: 81-83). From the mid-1970s, Israel's global arms exports saw a major boom when they reached US\$50 million in 1975, US\$140 million in 1976, and US\$250-300 million in 1979 (Klieman 1984: 12). Scholars like Gerald M. Steinberg pointed out the following factors for the growth in arms exports: "external security threats; unstable military security relationships and alliances; vulnerability to manipulation by exporters; national pride; employment in high technology; and technological stimulation of other sectors (Steinberg 1986: 163).

With the rise of arms productions, South Africa became an important market. Several industries began manufacturing equipments which were desired by South Africa, namely, combat aircraft, electronic warfare systems, missiles and naval craft. Along with Central and South America, South Africa became a target for Israel's arms exports. A scholar expressed that Israel began selling arms to "pariah states" because of certain obstacles developed elsewhere and, as a result, from Israel's point of view, "An indigenous defence industry is deemed essential to national survival and the cost of defence production requires arms exports. Since sales to a number of more 'legitimate' states such as Austria and Ecuador are blocked, Israel is left with a limited range of customers" and South Africa came to fill this void (Steinberg 1983: 302).

Acknowledging South Africa's vast resources and funds, Israel sought to develop new weapons systems by sharing its own scientific expertise and technological advancements. This had come in consonance with South Africa's longing for a self-reliant defence industry. During the mid-1970s, discussions were held for the purchase of Israeli-made tanks worth US\$10,000 per unit. Peres was more interested in South African investment and asked the latter to invest 25 percent on an aircraft project and 33 percent on the missile project (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 84). When South Africa turned down this request, Israel went ahead with a joint-production programme with Shah's Iran under the name "Project Flower" (Parsi 2007: 75-78).

In June 1975, Israel and South Africa clinched a deal worth US\$84 million for 200 tank engines, and negotiated with IMI for the purchase of arms and ammunitions worth over US\$100 million (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 84). South Africa's Prime Minister Johannes Vorster visited Israel in April 1976. This visit enhanced military

cooperation between the two countries even though Vorster denied the reports about an evolving arms relationship (JTA 1976b). Both countries agreed to set up a joint ministerial committee to facilitate better economic and trade cooperation, and that the committee would convene annually to review progress. However, some were of the view that the cooperation also covered aspects of arms sales and nuclear cooperation (Hunter 1987a: 32, Peters 1992: 157).

An important reason for the speculations over a possible military agreement was the places the South African leader visited during his tour, namely, IAI's assembly line of the fighter jet Kfir, naval and air bases. Further, he met several military and intelligence officials and discussed military-related issues (MERIP 1976a: 21). These visits were not covered by the media during the tour but were considered as a shopping trip for Israeli arms. Moreover, as Israel was undergoing rapid weapons production programme at the time, Vorster's visit was seen as an attempt to commit South African investment in some of defence projects. Israel clinched arms deal with South African worth US\$700 million during the visit. This was facilitated with the help of an Israeli navy officer named Admiral Binyamin Telem who took the visiting leader around Israel (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 95). The visit laid the ground for a better collaboration which had improved relations into a leading weapons developer and a force in the international arms trade. According to Joel Peter, military relations were concentrated on three main areas after Vorster's visit: direct sale of Israeli arms to South Africa, cooperation in the development and financing of weapons systems; and, training in counter-insurgency techniques and the sharing of intelligence information (Peters 1992: 157-158).

Vorster's visit opened more channels of military relations as he sought assistance in delivering naval vessels, fighter aircraft, counter-insurgency equipments and missiles. Apart from this, both the countries discussed the establishment of joint-manufacturing projects in South Africa and the latter's investment in Israel's defence industry (Adams 1984: 110). South Africa sought help to overhaul carriers of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the armours of the tanks which went to Iskoor (Ibid.). Towards the end of 1976, South Africa purchased Reshef patrol boats, and agreed to build three under license in Durban dockyards (Ojo 1988: 130). The latter programme was to be assisted by engineers who had received training in Israel. Six

more such boats were ordered from Israel by the end of 1977. In the same year, Israel's defence ministry dispatched a special military advisor Colonel Amos Baram amidst heightened threats from Angola's communist troops (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 97, Beit-Hallahmi, 1987: 121).

Military items purchased by South Africa, during the late 1970s, included mortars, electronic surveillance equipments, radar stations, anti-guerrilla alarm systems and night vision devices, high technology items for South African helicopters, Soviet-made artillery pieces, etc (Hunter 1987a: 40). While Israeli arms sales constituted an important dimension of their military relations, it was reciprocated by South Africa. For example, Israel agreed to modernise 150 South African Centurion tanks, and in return, the latter provided steel required for armouring of its Chariot or Merkava tanks (Burnett 1978: 598). South Africa had also agreed to supply technologies for modernising its obsolete steel industry. Israel further supplied a number of Merkava tanks to South Africa in exchange for more steels and this barter-system was known as "steel-for-technology deal" (Adams 1984: 111). **Table 4-2** gives the detail of weapons systems delivered by Israel to South Africa.

**Table 4-2: Major Weapon Systems Delivered by Israel to South Africa**

<b>Supplier/ Recipient or Licensor</b>	<b>No. Ordered</b>	<b>Weapon Designation</b>	<b>Weapon description</b>	<b>Year of Order/ License</b>	<b>Year of Deliveries</b>	<b>No. Delivered or Produced</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>L: South Africa</b>	175	Gabriel-2	Anti-ship missile	1974	1977-1986	175	For Reshef (Minister) FAC; South African designation Skerpioen
	9	Reshef/ Saar-4	FAC	1974	1977-1986	9	6 produced in South Africa; South African designation Minister; 3 more cancelled
	64	Scout	UAV	1979	1980-1986	64	Incl Assembly/Production in South Africa
<b>R: South Africa</b>	24	M-68/M-71 155mm	Towed gun	1976	1977	24	South African designation G-4
	37	Kfir C-7	Fga Aircraft	1982	1992-1994	37	Modified in South Africa to Cheetah-C; possibly only airframes
	6	Mooney -201	Light Aircraft	1983	1983	6	For 'homeland' Ciskei; second-hand; lease; part of deal with Israeli company for training of Ciskei pilots
	4	Boeing -707	Transport aircraft	1985	1986		Second Hand 2 – Modernized before delivery to tanker and 2 to

							ELINT aircraft
	50	Python - 3	SRAAM	1985	1987	10	For Mirage F-1C combat aircraft; South African designation V3S

**Note:** L: Licensed production; R: Recipient

**Source:** SIPRI 2015

#### b. Counterterrorism and Intelligence Sharing

Israel and South Africa had similar problems of infiltration from their hostile neighbours. This provided an incentive to them to engage in countering terrorism and sharing of intelligence information. During the late 1970s, firms such as Tadiran, Elbit, and IAI sold electronic warfare systems such as electronic fences, communication systems, night vision equipments for land and helicopters, infiltration alarm systems, etc to South Africa (Joseph 1988: 48-49). These firms helped in the establishment of South Africa's electronics industry and enhanced the capabilities of its military communication equipments. Tadiran even established its subsidiary in South Africa to manufacture electronic devices for counter-intelligence purpose (Ojo 1988: 131).

In the words of Jane Hunter:

As it is clear that in their daily routines the South Africa police and military, the enforcers of *apartheid*, benefit directly from state of the art Israeli technology, it is equally clear that the so-called "dual-use" communications gear used by the police and military must be included in the category of military goods that should be denied to South Africa (by both the US and Israel) (Hunter 1987a: 47).

The above expression highlights concerns over the secretive arms relations that were thriving despite a sanction imposed against South Africa by the UN in 1963.

What enticed South Africa towards the Israeli electronic military technologies was the latter's efficiency in preventing the infiltration of the Palestinian armed groups or guerrilla fighters inside its territory. With its constant engagement with the Palestinian groups since the late 1960s, Israel gained considerable expertise on electronic fencing and detection of ground movements (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 124). As a part of their



military cooperation, it played an important role in South Africa's efforts to guard its borders against infiltration (Adams 1984: 43).

In 1975, the South African invasion of Angola became a turning point. As a result of its humiliating retreat, South Africa began searching for artillery systems to maintain an edge over its adversaries and was enticed by Israeli artillery systems. The military cooperation was further strengthened by the denial of the US to supply South Africa with materials required to fight the guerrillas. Due to this, the need for self-reliance became a pivotal priority for South Africa. As a result, the concept of "Fortress South Africa" emerged, and it turned towards Israel to acquire defence-related items (Ibid.). Since the mid-1970s, Israel began to take up active roles in establishing a unit for border patrol and stationed 50 security specialists to oversee and supervise the South Africans (Ibid: 93). The latter had ordered electronic devices worth millions of dollars including electronic fences, night visions, microwave protection and detection systems, barbed wires and anti-personal mines (Ibid.).

In 1978, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Defence Kobie Coetsee urged his countrymen to "build a ring of steel" around his country's borders and this was visible, particularly near Angola and Mozambique, where the Israeli-manufactured anti-personal mines were installed (Hunter 1987a: 41). A year before, South Africa's army chief, Constand Viljoen, visited Israel and observed the checkpoints and tactics used by the IDF while searching for any infiltrators (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 103). Thereafter, the SADF began expressing its desire to learn from Israel's battlefield training methods, and sent 22 members to IDF's combat school (Ibid.). By the time the Angolan Bush War in Namibia (then South West Africa) started in 1966, SADF and the South African police had been trained by Israel's counter-terrorism experts. Beyond this, Israeli military experts even visited bordering areas and shared their knowledge of engaging with armed groups. In turn, hundreds of South African police personnel paid visits to get training in law-enforcement activities. Cooperation in this field came into use when Israel assisted in pushing out the guerrillas of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) from Namibian border areas, in the late 1970s. As both the countries moved closer with military cooperation, South Africans were well-versed with the anti-guerrilla warfare techniques, especially

intelligence gathering, and were “taking the initiative to force guerrillas to fight on South Africa’s terms on the guerrillas’ territory” (Adams 1984: 90).

Towards prevention of infiltration and border surveillance, both cooperated in military intelligence. Institutional cooperation began between and National Intelligence Service (NIS), formerly known as Bureau for State Security (BOSS), later renamed as Department of National Security (DONS) in September 1978 and Security Police and the Department of Military Intelligence (DMI) and their Israeli counterparts (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 126, Joseph 1988: 48; Adams 1984: 86). Israeli intelligence service was not only cooperating with South Africa but with a few Sub-Saharan African states which have been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

For South Africa, cooperation in this area was of immense significance as it was witnessing heightened threats from forces which were antagonistic to the *apartheid* regime. The intelligence cooperation was similar to the one forged by Israel with SAVAK Iran’s secret service during the reign of Shah (Farhang 1989: 87, Abadi 2004: 35). A significant coordination in military training and intelligence-sharing was seen when Israel helped the forces deployed by South Africa against the anti-government forces in Angola and Mozambique during the 1970s and the 1980s. One of the earliest incidents was the alleged training of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola or UNITA rebels fighting against the Angolan government (Hunter 1986a: 3).

In the South African context, Israel’s counterinsurgency and military assistance was highly criticised by Hunter in the following words:

...The white government’s practice of domestic counterinsurgency combines outright military brutality with the extensive use of informers and collaborators. It is impossible to know how many refinements of these age-old techniques have been borrowed from the Israeli’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. The Israeli system of village leagues is obviously comparable to the hated-town councils imposed on segregated townships by the *apartheid* government... (Hunter 1987a: 54-55).

The alliance formed by these two countries received unwanted attention, and this happened at a time when Israel’s legitimacy began to face severe attack in forum such as the UN from pro-Palestinian groupings.

A very close linkage between Israel and South Africa's arms industry was highlighted when the former ambassador to South Africa, Alon Liel, said,

We created the South African arms industry. They assisted us to develop all kinds of technology because they had a lot of money. When we were developing things together we usually gave the know-how and they gave the money. After 1976, there was love affair between the security establishments of the two countries and their armies... We were involved in Angola as consultants to the [South African army]. You had Israeli officers there cooperating with the army. The link was very intimate (McGreal 2006).

This indicated the robustness of the military cooperation and Israel's involvement with South Africa's problems with its neighbour.

### c. Navy

Another important area that constituted bilateral military cooperation was in the naval warfare. Israel's navy power was very limited despite its control over a vast section of the Mediterranean Sea. There were instances in the early 1980s when the Israeli Navy carried out amphibious operations against the PLO bases and other installations (Steinberg 1986: 179). In order to sharpen its naval capabilities, IAI's Ramta division and Israel Shipyards Ltd began to manufacture small, light and fast patrol boats.

Before the 1967 French embargo, Israeli-designed ships such as Saar 1, 2 and 3 were manufactured in France (Ibid.). Owing to the rising naval threats from the sea, in February 1973, Israel announced its plans to launch new missile boats superior to the ones built in France, and was named as Reshef. This 450-ton diesel-powered vessel was armed with Gabriel surface-to-surface missiles and was regarded as one of the most sophisticated in the world at that time. The boat could carry a crew of 45 and had a speed of 40 knots per hour (JTA 1973a). One of the main reasons for such development was to reduce Israel's dependence on foreign sources for weapons systems. In 1978, an improved version of the Reshef was launched and it was named as Nitzahon, and was armed with six Gabriel missiles, two naval guns and aircraft batteries (JTA 1978). By 1980, larger missile boats such as Aliya-Class joined the Reshef family and they were manufactured in Haifa's Israel Shipyards. With gaining expertise in this area, the RAMTA division manufactured Dvora and were equipped with missile launchers. This new boat had a helicopter landing pad and could carry

helicopter for scouting and other purposes. Aliyah had a normal speed of 42 knots (JTA 1980a).

During the 1970s, Israel supplied some of its tactics and technology to South Africa's navy. Cooperation between the two states in this area was mainly revolved around surface craft and submarines (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 122). The peak cooperation was seen when both the countries took up the project to develop nuclear submarines. During the mid-1970s there were frequent visits between the countries. In 1975, an Israeli flotilla visited South Africa, and in the succeeding year, 50 South African navy personnel paid reciprocal visit for receiving training on the Israeli missile boats (JTA 1976a). Israel's made its first delivery of the missile boat to South Africa in 1977.

The timing of this cooperation happened at a crucial juncture. Israel came to South African rescue when the country's navy was hard-hit by the French embargo. Following the embargo, in 1978, South Africa's defence minister Botha expressed the need for a change in the naval strategy of his country (Adams 1984:121). When many Western countries began dissociating themselves from South Africa, Israel Shipyards Ltd. signed a contract to manufacture missile boats. In 1974, Israel sold Gabriel sea-to-sea missiles to South Africa and the latter received the licence to build Reshef boats in the country. In 1983, the South African navy could launch eight such boats. As cooperation increased, Israel trained various South African commandoes. South Africa also received the licence to build 65-foot Dabur patrol boat (Hunter 1987: 43). All these boats were equipped with Gabriel missiles. Finally, permission was granted to South Africa to manufacture a missile named Scorpion based on its Gabriel II missiles (Bunce 1984: 45). Israeli military advisors trained the South African navy personals to use these systems.

What continued to be an interesting aspect of Israeli-South African military cooperation was the somewhat clandestine nature of arms trade dealings, as witnessed during the UN arms embargo against the latter. In order to avoid condemnation from various countries connected with the boycott, South Africa renamed Reshef as "Minister", so that it appeared to be a locally-manufactured one (Hunter 1987: 43, Adams 1984: 122), and production of missile systems continued in full swing. As the

Israelis began to update their Gabriel II missiles, the South African missile programmes also underwent some changes.

In continuation of its military assistance programme, Israel trained several South African sailors, mostly in the techniques to operate the vessels. Signalling the strong military-industrial cooperation, Israel assisted South Africa in establishing its “virtually non-existent” ship building industry (Adams 1984: 123). It was, once again, the Israeli expertise that came into the use while setting up the Sandock-Austral yard in South Africa. Israel also supplied six of its very-advanced Dvora fast patrol boats to South Africa. Right after this, both planned to develop an improved version of the Reshef boat. Israel was aware that such newly developed boats would be in demand from the navies of the developing countries. With a successful combination of Israeli technology and South African capital, another vessel known as Q9 was manufactured by the Haifa Shipyards during mid-1970s. Q9 had a cruising range of 5,000 miles and could carry helicopter to assist in spotting and fire control. Its equipments included improved version of Gabriel missiles and Harpoon missiles manufactured by MacDonnell-Douglas Co, and required a crew of 45 members. It remained unclear as to how many of these boats were delivered but a report mentioned of three potential buyers (JTA 1977a). While the Israeli Navy was suspected to have taken its first delivery of the boat in 1984, South Africa availed the same sometime later.

The Israeli-made Aliya-Class missile boat enticed the South African defence planners. Scholars like James Adams had mentioned that these boats entered the service only in 1983 and the South African naval officials made sea trials (Adams 1984: 123). There was no concrete information about any sale of this but the South Africans had mentioned their requirements, and discussed quantity and pricing. Taking a step further, a licensing agreement was reached between the two countries wherein South Africa could construct this missile boat in its soil. Most of these dealings took place between 1977 and 1978 when Israel supplied guided missile boats, and between 1978 and 1984 when South Africa began manufacturing these systems under an Israeli licence (JTA 1986b).

In their cooperation in naval warfare, one of the most ambitious projects allegedly undertaken by Israel and South Africa was the development of nuclear submarines

(Beit-Hallahmi 1987:123). There were no concrete reports to validate the veracity of such cooperation. If there was any such cooperation, then it might have been carried out with the help of a third party, namely Chile (Hunter 1987a: 43). Israel and South Africa enjoyed excellent relationships with several Latin American countries during the mid-1970s and like Israel, South Africa too had military contacts with countries like Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay.

Naval cooperation, beside arms trade, was one of the most important features of Israel-South Africa-Chile relations (Breto 1984: 189). Suspicion over the Chilean connection was aptly expressed by Jane Hunter in the following words, “If there is any substance to the reports of an Israeli-South African submarine project, then in all probability the ship will be a three-way project including Israel, South Africa and Chile. Israel is performing the same Mirage update for Chile that resulted in the South African Cheetah” (Hunter 1987a: 43). There had been no substantial evidence to show the cooperation between Israel and South Africa on the submarine project and writings on this aspect were based on speculations. It did not become a matter of high suspicion as it was discussed during Vorster’s visit in 1976 when he particularly sought to maintain a very close links with Israel on naval warfare.

#### d. Air Force

Israel-South Africa relations also extended between the two air forces. This had come more in the form of joint flying exercises and was concentrated on Israel’s advice on matters related to air combat, instructions on planning airbases and the maintenance of aircraft. Israel helped the South Africa air force industry by assisting them in providing maintenance and the parts for the helicopters (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 124). The actual groundwork for cooperation in this field had begun in the 1960s. As it was the case with Israel, South Africa also based its air force on French-origin technologies and products (Ibid: 123). It was on Israel’s advice that South Africa purchased French-made supersonic jets, Dassault Mirage (Ibid.). This had triggered a close cooperation. Initial cooperation in military aviation sector was more concentrated on Israel’s upgrade of South African fighter jets (Hunter 1987a: 42). During the 1960s, this aircraft was considered to be the best available in the entire continent. It is imperative to understand that Israel’s skills in upgrading outdated weapons systems were imbibed from its experience with the Soviet-made systems

captured during its wars with the Arab countries. Moreover, most of the engineers in the Israeli aviation industries had come from the then Soviet Union which had a better knowledge of the weapons systems.

Apparently, South Africa purchased some of the items manufactured by the IAI. The intelligence branch of the SADF used these Israel-made RPVs to gather strategic information before it attacked the bases of African National Congress (ANC) in May 1983. This weapons system had been very helpful in tracking the guerrilla activities in South Africa's neighbourhoods, and was mostly deployed in Namibia and Mozambique (Joseph 1988: 49). This deployment enabled South Africa to have a clear view of its front lines, and in reducing casualties in times of military engagements. There were unconfirmed reports that Israel provided Arava-STOL to South Africa to replace the latter's aged propeller-driven early-warning aircraft Shackletons manufactured by Britain (Ojo 1988: 131).

The time when Israel reportedly sold RPVs to South Africa coincided with the visits of several Israeli officials and a continued correspondence between leaders from both the countries. This was visible more between early and mid-1980s. In 1981, Israeli Defence Minister Ariel Sharon made a secret visit to South Africa and met its troops stationed in Namibia, very close to the border of Angola. In a letter addressed to the South African defence minister, General M.A. de Mallan, after the visit, Sharon expressed his hopes to strengthen the defence cooperation between the two countries (Digital Archive 2006b). Sharon also hoped to sign a "Memorandum of Understanding on fields of Strategic Cooperation." He had authorised the Israeli Chief of General Staff Raphael Eitan to visit South Africa in February 1982 (Digital Archive 2006b). In an interview given in the US, right after the visit, Sharon talked of several concerns regarding South Africa's position. The Cold War calculations of both the US and Israel were highlighted by the Israeli leader and appreciated the moves taken by South Africa to resist Soviet-backed military infiltration in the area (Middleton 1981). Without mentioning directly about the Israeli-South African military relations, Sharon emphasised on the need of his country for modern weaponry to fight against Soviet-armed troops in the region.

In a letter to Arens in May 1983, Malan hinted at South African's unhappiness over military ties with Israel. Malan acknowledged the importance of reciprocity between Israel and South Africa but added:

.... The imbalance of purchase between our two countries in the military field is perhaps one of the biggest problems for the continuation of co-operation. During the past decade we have supported you in this field to the extent of more than 1 billion dollars, while your support to us has been less than 10 billion dollars. This imbalance reflects very seriously in the overall trade pattern between our two countries, and is of such a proportion that my government must of needs consider alternatives. The South African military industry has developed considerably during the past decade, and if the availability of strategic raw materials and military metals are added to the product range, I am confident that your support in this field could achieve the reciprocal balance to which you refer... (Digital Archive 2006d).

The above sentences signify the magnitude of the military cooperation between these two countries. It has become rather clear that Israel had significantly assisted South Africa in building its arms industry. One probable reason for Israel's slow reactions to certain military programmes could be the constant vigilance on Israel's clandestine military supplies to South Africa amid the arms embargo. This was very prevalent since the mid-1980s when pressures against the *apartheid* regime began to be intensified.

Alongside the training given to South African air force personals, Israel had agreed to assist South Africa in developing a fighter jet plane (Hunter 1987: 43). The visit of the premier Vorster to Israel in 1976 and military-related agreements signed during that strengthened the cooperation. Prior to this visit, in June 1975, there was a secret meeting between Peres and Botha in Zurich, where officials from both countries discussed issues related to investment for the development of light-weight fighter, along with other purchases, night vision equipments, manufacture of arms, tanks, missile, etc (Digital Archive 2006a). Procurement of Kfir fighters was an important objective of Vorster's visit (Burnett 1978: 598). Before these two countries ventured into the alleged aircraft production project, Israeli technicians were engaged in modernising the latter's aircraft. Israeli-made avionics replaced the aging systems of South Africa's aircrafts. Apart from this, armaments ranging from air-to-air and air-to-ground rockets were fitted into South African planes (Ojo 1988: 131).



Once the French curtailed arms shipments to Israel, the latter began leaning on the US for military assistance, of which aircraft was one major component. This was the time when the latter began to concentrate more on the US-made jets, and started to acquire certain knowledge on the development of advance fighter planes. At this time, South Africa's fighter planes were mostly French-made such as Alouettes and Super-Frelon helicopters. With Israel's technical knowledge of the French-made weapons systems, it was able to provide maintenance and spare part for the mentioned steel birds (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 124). Such overhauling was done with the help of the Israeli technicians who were stationed in South Africa (Joseph 1988: 53). In some instances, owing to difficulties while repairing, manufacturers from Israel were called in to South Africa.

Israel and South Africa cooperated in the field of helicopters. While it was not as vibrant as that of aircrafts, there was a joint-venture between the two countries in the production of twin-seated Scorpion helicopter jointly by South Africa's Rotoflight Helicopters and Israel-based Chemavir-Masok. While the helicopters were manufactured in South Africa, its assembling was done in Israel (Adams 1984:112).

An event that had raised doubts over the Israeli-South African cooperation in aircraft production was the unveiling of South Africa's modern jet fighter, Cheetah, in July 1986. Its similarity with that of Israel's Kfir-2 brewed concerns, and this had widened speculations over a joint-project. Most of the components used in Cheetah, especially technology and avionics, were believed to be those which were used in the manufacture of Kfir (Polakow-Suransky 2014: 218).

Israel sold 36 Kfir jets worth US\$430 million to South Africa (Adams 1984: 117). This deal was struck in 1980 (Ojo 1988: 130). The issue was discussed and clinched during a three-day secret visit by Defence Minister Ezer Weizman to South Africa in March 1980 to discuss "security matters" (JTA 1980c). This visit allegedly paved the way for the alleged cooperation on Lavi fighter aircraft, which is discussed below. It was during this visit Israel reached an agreement whereby South Africa would finance the development of computerised flight systems for Kfir jets which South Africa obtained later for their Cheetah (Hunter 1987a: 44).

Although various reports on their cooperation on Kfir jets were made available, most of them were based on speculations and they often seemed to be inaccurate. Scholar like Steinberg was of the view that those reports which claimed Israel of selling Kfir combat aircrafts to South Africa were false (Steinberg 1993). Instead, he pointed out that such speculations emerged due to the similarity of the South African Cheetah with that of Kfir.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), South Africa became the leading arms importer of Israel during the 1970s and accounted for 35 percent of the latter's arms exports (SIPRI 1981: 116). The increasing isolation of South Africa during this period and need for military items and technologies led to an enhanced cooperation with Israel. This was the time when the latter enjoyed a commendable success in its arms diplomacy with a few Latin American countries, especially Argentina. Moreover, the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 strengthened Israeli-South African military relations as Israel was looking for partners to meet the rising costs of its military research, development and production (Steinberg 1993). In the given situation, South Africa filled the void.

Owing to the rising threats in the African region, especially the presence of Soviet-backed forces which were hostile to the *apartheid* regime, South Africa needed fighters such as Kfir for its immediate and short-term defensive measures. South Africa particularly wanted such Israeli-made jets as it was familiar with the technical specifications used in the latter's jets. As highlighted earlier, South African pilots were initially trained in Israel and they were familiar with the tactics to face air threat from Soviet-armed forces. As a result, they were aware of the operations and functioning. An added advantage of Kfir was its air defence role as interceptor, which would give the South African Air Force (SAAF) a capability to penetrate outside its own borders and defend its own territory against any air assault (Adams 1984: 117).

As Israel and South Africa were aware of the fact that short-term aerial defensive measures could be easily overpowered by the Soviet-origin major weapons systems, they had decided to complete a new project for a more sophisticated fighter. Since the 1970s, Israel had been looking for a replacement of its Kfir fighters, which culminated in the Lavi multi-purpose fighter aircraft project (Zakheim 1996). In 1980,

the Likud government of Israel finally approved the programme (DeLoughry 1990: 34). It was believed that Africa might have been a “silent partner” in the development of this aircraft (Hunter 1987a: 43). A detailed analysis of this project is highlighted in Chapter Five.

When talks of collaboration between Israel and South Africa in the production of Lavi emerged, there were reports of the former willing to sell this fighter aircraft to the latter as well as to Chile, Taiwan and Argentina (Hunter 1987a: 44). This came about when Sharon was looking for financial sources for the project and Weizman discussed about Lavi during his 1980-visit to South Africa but no agreements were clinched. In its quest for partnerships, Israel began looking at a triangular relationship involving Taiwan and these three countries, which were considered as “outcastes”, began to view themselves as “garrison states surrounded by hostile neighbours” (Subramaniam 1982: 261). If these triangular relations were to materialise, then the three countries would share the costs of R&D and each one would manufacture some parts of the aircrafts. Upon completion, besides purchasing the finished-aircraft for their respective air forces, they would share the export earnings (Adams 1984: 120). For this, South Africa allegedly agreed to invest millions of dollars until the aircraft reach its flying stage. The project, however, was finally terminated in 1987 primarily due to US pressures. Grounding of Lavi project shattered the dream of both Israel and South Africa to develop one of the most advanced jets.

#### e. Nuclear Cooperation

When one talks about Israel-South Africa military relations, their alleged cooperation in the field of nuclear weapons cannot be ignored. This aspect of their cooperation has remained the most mysterious one. Derivations with regard to nuclear cooperation between the two countries were often based on inaccurate evidences and assumptions. One was of the view that nuclear cooperation between Israel and South Africa is more a “myth” than a reality (Steinberg 1987: 31). In the words of Steinberg:

Reports regarding Israeli collaboration with South Africa in the development of nuclear weapons are widespread and have entered the dubious realms of “conventional wisdom” and “common knowledge”. As such, these reports are frequently repeated, often without reference or substantiation, in news articles and academic studies on nuclear proliferation, *apartheid*, and Israeli foreign policy (Steinberg 1987: 31).

The cooperation in this field indicated the closeness of the cooperation between the two countries.

Before going into this alleged cooperation, it is imperative to understand the basic reasons behind Israel's nuclear programme which began in 1949, and in the 1950s it began working closely with France (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 129). In order to carry out further research, the Atomic Energy Commission was established in 1952 and first under jurisdiction of the Defence Ministry, but in 1966 was placed under the control of the Prime Minister (Ibid: 130).

Explaining the Israeli nuclear programme, Avner Cohen commented:

The idea that Israel should acquire a nuclear-weapon capability is as old as the state itself. In the early days its took more than a little chuzpa to believe that tiny Israel could launch a nuclear program, but for a state born of the Holocaust and surrounded by the hostile Arab world, not to do so would have been irresponsible (Avner 1998a: 9).

The suffering of the Jews and the eminent threat perceptions after May 1948 became an incentive to begin this programme. Deterrence became one of the objectives for David Ben-Gurion to meet Israel's security challenges in the face of the Arab countries which were unified.

Right after its establishment, Israel started to initiate its nuclear programme by exploring uranium deposits. In the wake of the 1948 war, David Ben-Gurion started to think of a "long-range" national security strategy that his country would need to implement (Perlmutter *et al.* 2003: 3). He had major concerns for the country's security, particularly after the Holocaust. Moreover, Israel was facing heightened threats from its neighbours, particularly from Nasser's Egypt. The Israeli prime minister had envisaged that the adversaries would not be ready to change their stand against and as a result, Israel would continue to face threats to its survival. With this long-term concern in mind, Ben-Gurion began to search for military alliances outside its region, and the need for research in nuclear science was recognised (Peri 1983: 38-69).

The decision to launch the nuclear programme was taken solely by Ben-Gurion in the mid-1950s. He neither discussed this issue with his cabinet nor with any "independent elected or nonelected body" as this was "a lonely decision by an authoritative leader

who was determined to pursue his own vision with the assistance of a few loyal executives” (Avner 2010: 57). Apart from Ernst David Bergmann, who was the chief scientist, the Israeli prime minister and Peres, who was the Director General of the Ministry of Defence (1953-1959), became the “principle architects and the driving force behind the nascent Israeli program” (Steinbach 2002: 331). Before the beginning of the nuclear programme, Ben-Gurion had a few concerns pertaining to questions over the ability of Israel to conduct the project on its own, or the availability of reliable and trustworthy supplier—politically and technologically—and whether it could be carried out secretly (Avner 2010: 57). When it became evident by mid-1956 that Israel could not develop the project under the *Atoms for Peace* framework, announced by the US President Dwight D. Eisenhower on 8 December 1953 at the UN (United Nations General Assembly 1953), Ben-Gurion turned towards France for technological assistance.

The reason for the Israeli-French cooperation is described by John Steinbach in the following words:

For a variety of reasons including revulsions over the Holocaust, guilt about manipulating Israel into attacking Egypt to justify the 1956 Suez War, and mutual interest in developing a nuclear weapons program, France provided the bulk of early nuclear cooperation with Israel, culminating in construction of a heavy water-moderated, natural uranium reactor and plutonium-reprocessing facility... (Steinbach 2002: 331).

The collaboration intensified after the Suez Crisis, and there were frequent exchanges of nuclear expertise between Israel and France.

Between 1957 and 1960, Israel developed its first nuclear reactor in Dimona with the help of France. The credit for this establishment was given to Peres and further enhanced his reputation both on his personal and military front (Perlmutter 1969: 75). Meanwhile, Israel started to have problems with France during early-mid 1960 over nuclear-related issues. The relations between the two began to sour after de Gaulle became the president in January 1959. As observed by one, “France’s new president decided to end, and to reveal, its nuclear partnership with Israel. Not only did de Gaulle decide to halt France’s involvement, but he also insisted that Israel declare the Dimona project peaceful and place it under safeguard” (Avner 2010: 60). However, a visit to Paris in June 1960 by Ben-Gurion improved the situation to a certain extent

where he mentioned that Israel did not intend to build nuclear weapons and would it not build a separate plant for plutonium (Peri 1983: 8). The secretive nature of the Israeli nuclear programme became a matter of concern not only for the departing Eisenhower administration and but also for his successors, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. This issue is addressed briefly in the next chapter.

Nuclear-related cooperation between Israel and South Africa dates back to the 1960s. When Israel and France began cooperation in the nuclear area, South Africa also wanted to have nuclear capability. What enticed Israel to South Africa was its vast uranium resource but the latter was not willing to supply uranium to Israel as it once refused South African inspections of the nuclear sites (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 42). The first shipment of uranium to Israel allegedly took place in 1957 (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 133). During the 1950s, South Africa was one of the major suppliers of uranium to the US. Its importance in this field began to be recognised when it started to engage with the newly-formed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) located in Vienna (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 42).

During the 1960s, both Israel and South Africa were looking for partnerships in various fields. Israel, which had already expressed its desire to build nuclear capabilities, was seeking reliable suppliers of uranium. Simultaneously, South Africa's major Western clients began to reach out to other alternate sources and as a result, it began to search for buyers. These needs on both ends became compatible.

What came as a breakthrough in the Israeli-South African nuclear cooperation was the transformation of the latter to a republic in 1961, after the British gave up its rule. Taking advantage of this transition, an agreement was signed in 1962 where South Africa would supply yellowcake, a uranium concentrate, to Israel. This particular form of uranium could be used to fuel nuclear reactors. Both countries began to trade yellowcake gradually. By 1963, a bilateral agreement on safeguards was signed, and covered "provisions forbidding the use of South African uranium for atomic weapons or weapons research and allowing South African inspectors to view the reactors and the material and their operating records" (Ibid.).

Another commonality that bridged the cooperation between Israel and South Africa was their refusal to sign the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) due to the

concerns both had regarding their survival (Clemens 2004: 226-227). Having situated in a hostile environment, Israel and South Africa had similar motivations of developing nuclear capabilities (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 132). That said South African was not as enthusiastic as Israel was to acquire nuclear weapons systems. It was only when the regional uprisings against the *apartheid* regime began to gain momentum in the 1970s that South Africa began to consider this capability a “bonus” (Hunter 1987a: 34).

During the 1960s when Israel began warming up to South Africa, most of the latter’s nuclear needs, such as materials, technologies or trainings, were supplied by big countries such as the US, West Germany, France and Britain. Israel’s outreach towards South Africa coincided with the “peaceful” atomic energy programme carried out by the US where both of them also participated (Ibid: 35). As a part of this programme, South Africa received its first Safari-1 nuclear reactor in 1961. After this, South Africa began to explore means to start its own energy programme and it had resulted in the construction of another reactor Safari-2, in 1967 (Joseph 1988: 61). This was developed with the assistance of Israel and its scientists began to visit South Africa on a regular basis.

In the words of Adams:

For South Africa, Israel had one advantage: a relatively advanced nuclear industry that had been working both on uranium-enrichment techniques and on the design of a nuclear bomb. For Israelis, South Africa possessed almost unlimited supplies of uranium that it might be persuaded to part with as part of a uranium-for-technology swap. To them, it was more an investment for the future, as South Africa was not then in a position to supply enriched uranium and Israel did not as yet possess the laser enrichment technology that a few years later was to astonish the American scientific community (Adams 1984: 171).

This clearly indicated the favourable opportunity that brought Israel and South Africa closer with the nuclear cooperation.

It was indeed a marriage between Israeli technical skills and South Africa’s abundant uranium reserves. Among the many visits of Israeli scientists to South Africa, a particular visit that pushed their cooperation further was that of Bergmann in September 1968 (Adams 1984: 171). During his visit to the South Africa Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, he addressed the commonalities of problems

faced by both the countries, and the need to cooperate intensively in technological areas. Towards the end of his deliverance, Bergmann emphasised on nuclear physics and other sciences and in his words:

... In general, I have found that in nuclear physics the two countries are verging on not similar, but almost identical lines, and it is no secret that today in the theatre of nuclear physics, in which the instrument is extremely expensive and every experiment is equally expensive, there are indications of a move towards international collaboration instead of the isolated work of a national science establishment in spite of the fact that such establishment is, of course, the pride of every country. It is difficult to indicate, if one speaks of fundamental science, whether South Africa or Israel is the more highly developed, I think that in both countries the development is uneven, and there, are many areas in which Israel undoubtedly can learn from South Africa, for instance, in the field of medicine. There are areas in which Israel has been forced to be more progressive, and in which, perhaps, a country like South Africa could learn from her... (Bergmann 1968).

This visit significantly boosted the cooperation between Israel and South Africa in scientific and nuclear fields.

The visit of Vorster to Israel in 1976 could be considered as the cornerstone of the Israeli-South African nuclear cooperation. During a meeting between Rabin and Vorster, agreements were signed to enhance their trade and particularly the utilisation of South African “raw materials” (Bunce 1984: 44). While interacting with the Israeli officials, they discussed a missile named “Chalet”. The South African leader showed interest in the Israeli-made Jericho missile and asked if they were with the “correct” payload and, Peres said, “The correct payload was available in three sizes” (Digital Archive 2006a). A scholar observed that the term “payload” was an indication of a discussion over nuclear warheads (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 83). Owing to the cost factor of this system and technology-related issues, mostly for South Africa, this deal was aborted, but this sparked the beginning of cooperation on nuclear missiles between the two countries.

Since most of Israel-South Africa military-related affairs were kept under-wraps, the exact nature of their nuclear cooperation could not be pinpointed but developments from the mid-1970s onwards hinted at a robust cooperation between them. The frequent movements between the scientists of both the countries and interactions between intelligence officials raised suspicions over their cooperation in nuclear



weapons programme. In 1977, South Africa secretly imported 30 grams of tritium and codenamed it as “tea leaves”, and exported 600 tons of uranium oxide (Lieberman 2004: 9).

One of the interesting revelations regarding the nuclear weapons cooperation was brought out by Jane Hunter when she highlighted South Africa’s invitation to Israel to carry out a nuclear test (Hunter 1987: 35). This happened during Peres’s meeting with South African officials in 1976. The author has also mentioned about a similar invitation in 1966. Most of the available literature on this issue explores Israel’s desire to conduct a nuclear test far from the West Asian region. In 1974, the Israeli President Ephraim Katzir said, “It has always been our intention to develop a nuclear potential ... We now have that potential” (*The Risk Report* 1996). He went on to add that Israel would not be the first one to deploy such weapons in the region but could do it if circumstances necessitated for it (Joseph 1988: 59, Hunter 1987: 35).

During the mid-1970s, South African officials were looking for a place to conduct its own nuclear test. Meanwhile, in August 1977, the acting chief of the Soviet Embassy in Washington D.C., Vladillen Vasev, called on the White House and informed about the detection of a preparation by South Africa to conduct a nuclear test in the Kalahari Desert (Adams 1984: 182). This event was the first instance when the international community became aware of the extent of South Africa’s nuclear programme. However, due to the mounted pressures from the US, the Soviet Union, France and Britain, South Africa had to call off the test (Hunter 1986c: 13). A plausible reason behind this pressure was to prevent an escalation of nuclear arms race in the region, and internationally. However, this did not put an end to such endeavours of Israel and South Africa, and led to a more secretive interaction in the following years.

After two years, on 22 September 1979, VELA 6911, the American surveillance satellite recorded two queer flashes of light over the Indian Ocean (Lieberman 2004: 12). The detection had raised the possibility of a covert nuclear test conducted jointly by Israel and South Africa. In the midst of allegations, both the countries vehemently denied such cooperation. As soon as the news flashed, US President Jimmy Carter held an emergency meeting with the Secretaries of State and Defence, National Security Advisor and intelligence officials to gather evidence of the explosion. All

signs pointed towards Israel and South Africa. However, in one of the follow-up investigations, a few US officials, including scientists, denied a nuclear test and said that the explosion was caused by a meteoroid hitting the satellite (Richelson 2006). This assumption was based on the discrepancy in the bhangmeter readings while recording the second flash. According to one,

Because the bhangmeters were not equally sensitive it was not expected they would produce identical numerical values. But it was expected that the ratio between the two would be the same from one detonation to the next. In the case of the September 22 detection, the ratio was not what was expected from previous experience (Ibid.).

The US had tried hard to come to a definite conclusion but all the findings were obscure.

While the above finding did not conclude on a test that might have conducted by Israel and South Africa, there were couple of reasons why further doubts were raised. Firstly, the intensity of the flash was very similar to that of a nuclear explosion. This claim was substantiated by the record of the satellite, having registered 41 out of 41 nuclear tests. Experts raised questions as to why VELA would fail to detect explosion this particular case (Vishwanathan 2011: 36). Secondly, the area where the alleged test was conducted was quite an ideal one as it was deserted and with a high degree of natural radiation (Joseph 1988: 63). As probes were conducted in February 1980, American CBS-TV reported that the flash recorded by VELA was that of a nuclear test conducted by Israel and South Africa. A conclusion on a low-yield nuclear blast was arrived at after several parallel investigations carried out by the Defence Intelligence Agency, the CIA, Department of Navy, scientists from Los Alamos Laboratory, and the Naval Research Laboratory (Chazan 1983:189, Joseph 1988: 65). Israeli and South African governments continued to remain silent and did not provide any information.

Although the above events pointed towards a possible Israel-South African nuclear cooperation, the allegations regarding the nuclear tests, and the assumptions were critiqued by a few. As pointed out by Steinberg earlier, most of the allegations were largely based on the increasingly isolation of the two countries which coincided with their active nuclear-related activities. Their exchange of uranium for expertise was a reason behind the claims of nuclear weapons cooperation. Even though Israeli experts

might have assisted in the construction of Safari-2 reactor, Steinberg opined that the reactor was not entirely related to military programmes and weapons development, and that there was “no evidence of Israeli involvement in the South Africa jet-nozzle uranium enrichment process” (Steinberg 1987a: 35).

He went on to add that the raw materials which was discussed during Vosters’s 1976-visit was not uranium but coal needed for power generation. Further, the manner in which Adams concluded his take on the alleged explosion was quite intriguing: “He has been told categorically by very senior members of Israel’s intelligence community that the explosion was not an Israeli bomb. What is admitted is that there was a nuclear explosion and that Israel has helped South Africa develop its nuclear programme by supplying both personnel and nuclear technology” (Adams 1984: 195).

Such statements were problematic as Adams did not mention how he had come in contact with those officials and why would they convey such information to him. The lack of definite evidence made it seem that Israeli-South African nuclear cooperation was quite obscure in nature.

Notwithstanding the criticisms from the international community, the achievements made by Israel and South Africa in this sphere of military affairs were something to be reckoned with. Without much publicity, secretive military relations between the two countries could attain such heights. This had indicated a major technological breakthrough achieved by both the countries while trying to face various challenges from their adversaries as they exhibited a very high level of intimacy and trust in their relations (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 136).

The relations continued to flourish after 1979, and this was mainly seen in military areas. Israel and South Africa were not inhibited by the mounting pressures of major powers such US, but both had begun to cooperate more cautiously and with utmost secrecy. It was believed that both the countries went ahead with their nuclear cooperation. In December 1980, another similar sight was detected of a weapon being fired, probably a 155 mm nuclear shell from special howitzer which was acquired by South Africa with the help of Israel (Hunter 1987a: 38), and this was the year when Israel was installing equipments to make its thermonuclear weapons (Hunter 1986c:

13). In the following year, Israeli scientists were hired by South Africa to inspect its commercial nuclear reactors.

In Israeli-South African military relations, the period between 1980 and 1987 was the most important one. This was the time when their military relations were constantly watched by the US and the UN. The effectiveness and depth of their military relations and their arms transactions could be substantiated by the estimated figures. By the mid-1980s, Israel earned annually between US\$400 and US\$500 million from the military equipment and know-how it exported to South Africa. Israel had engaged very intensively with the South African military troops during the early and mid-1980s in the latter's fight against the communist guerrillas. Since the onset of 1980, there were frequent visits between the political and military leaders of both the countries. Most of them were concentrated on weapons supply, training and intelligence sharing. The early 1980s marked the high point of Israeli-South African military cooperation.

Simultaneously, amid high risk, the robustness of their military cooperation was signified when they held the annual Israeli-South African intelligence conference in Israel in 1984, and discussed Soviet military presence in the African region. In that year, South Africa's chief of staff for intelligence sought an approval from the SADF chief, Viljoen, for a secret visit to Israel to discuss cooperation in building and testing missiles (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 152). Such joint-initiatives had resulted in the modernisation of the Israeli-made Jericho 2 intermediate-range ballistic missile. In November of that year, South African foreign minister Roelof Frederik "Pik" Botha visited Israel and cherished the flourishing relations between the two governments, and security matter was an important agenda (JTA 1984a).

A little-known fact about Israel-South Africa military cooperation was their "coordinated exports" during the 1980s. One of the earliest instances was the joint efforts of Tadiran and South Africa's Consolidated Power to establish an electronics enterprise in Guatemala (Hunter 1987: 52). Beyond this, a report mentioned these two countries delivering Gabriel missiles, ammunitions, missile alert radar systems, and fighter jets, to Argentina in 1982 during the Malvinas/Falklands war with the British (Yapp 2011; Lelyveld 1982). Countries like Sri Lanka and Morocco received arms

from Israel and South Africa (Ibid.). The *apartheid* regime allegedly helped Israel in supplying weapons to Iran during the Iran-contra affair. This was the G-5 howitzer which South Africa obtained from the US with Israeli assistance. This was sold to Iraq as well (Masland 1988). From the Israeli-South African military cooperation began to be monitored closely by the international community, particularly the US.

### International Pressure against Apartheid

The era of *apartheid* in South Africa started after Malan came to power in May 1948. Since then, international forum such as the UN began to condemn the regime with several sanctions until the *apartheid* system was abolished in 1994. As early as December 1950, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolution 395 (V) and declared that the *apartheid* is “a policy of racial segregation” and “is necessarily based on doctrines of racial decimation” (United Nations General Assembly 1950: 24). In the following years, particularly between 1952 and 1959, most of the resolutions adopted by the UNGA condemned South Africa’s racial policies. Under intense pressure from African and Asian countries, the UNSC took its first action on South African by adopting resolution 134 on 1 April 1960. The resolution deplored the “situation arising out of the large-scale killings of unarmed and peaceful demonstrations against racial discrimination and segregation in the Union of South Africa” (United Nations Security Council 1960: 1). With these condemnations from the international community, the political isolation of South Africa increased from the 1960s, and it was similar to the Israeli experience.

Unlike previous cases, the UNSC adopted resolution 181 on 7 August 1963, and called on all the states to cease the sale and shipment of arms, ammunition and military vehicles to the *apartheid* regime (United Nations Security Council 1963: 7). This was the first time when an arms embargo was imposed against South Africa, and similar resolutions 282 adopted on 23 July 1970 and 311 on 4 February 1972 reinforced the need to observe the already-existing sanction of arms sales strictly (United Nations Security Council 1970: 12, United Nations Security Council 1972: 10). Meanwhile, the call for boycotting South African athletes in the field of sports also gained momentum in early 1970s. The criticism against those states which supplied weapons systems and conducted military collaboration with the *apartheid* regime became louder. In 1973 December, the UNGA resolution 3151 condemned the

“unholy alliance between Portuguese colonialism, South African racism, Zionism and Israeli imperialism” (United Nations General Assembly 1973: 33). Isolation of Israel and South Africa widened from the mid-1970s and the UNGA resolution 3379 of November 1975 determined that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination” (United Nations General Assembly 1975: 84). As such resolution drew parallels between the governments in Israel and South Africa, it gave further impetus to their cooperation, and the former managed to manoeuvre through the UN-imposed arms embargo against the *apartheid* regime in November 1977 (Hunter 1987a: 41). As their military cooperation continued despite these sanctions, international scrutiny on both these countries intensified.

By mid-1986, the US had begun to raise serious concerns over arming South Africa, and mostly by Israel. As a result, attempts have begun to pass the anti-*apartheid* bill, and its amendment Section 508 which would issue a report on those countries which violated arms embargo against South Africa (Branaman 1987: 5). In the report, countries such as Israel, France and Italy were mentioned as violators of the 1977 UN arms embargo against South Africa. Israel was never serious about this act which was still under consideration. Reports also surfaced about Israel-South African nuclear cooperation continuing till the end of 1986, but Peres denied such “unfounded claims” (JTA 1987a). However, when US Senator John Kerry reintroduced the mentioned section by adding the clause of terminating US military assistance to those countries violating the embargo, Israelis had begun to give serious thought to it (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195, 197). The issue became a pertinent one over US\$1.3 billion which was the annual US military assistance to Israel at the time.

During the late 1980s, Israel came under intense pressure for its arms exports to South Africa, especially from the US, and it was on the verge of scaling it down. This, in a way, put a big question over how Israel would earn from its exports without renewing any contracts. Klieman, once said, “Israeli arms manufacturers have reached such a level of production and importance within the Israeli economy that exporting weapons has become an economic imperative” (Friedman 1986a). He also predicted that any dwindle in the Israeli defence marketing strategies was likely to have an inevitable and profound impact on overall Israeli security, economy and diplomacy. Envisaging such decline in Israeli arms exports to South Africa, Thomas L Friedman eloquently

stated, "...The idea that the Jewish State should be so dependent on weapons sales for its economic or diplomatic survival is profoundly troubling to some people here, clashing with both their self-image and their vision of the Zionist utopia..." (Ibid.). From the late 1980s, the international campaign against the *apartheid* regime increased, and Israel was pressurised to end its military ties.

In 1987, the US began to push for further actions against the extensive military trade between Israel and South Africa. The State Department gave a detailed briefing to the US Congress on the issue (*The New York Times* 1987). In January of the year, Yossi Beilin, the Director General of the Israeli foreign ministry, announced that his country would also adopt the Western-led sanctions against the *apartheid* South Africa (JTA 1987a). He again denied signing of any military trade pact with South Africa during the last one decade and on 18 March, the Israeli government finally decided to cease new military contracts with South Africa while allowing the existing contracts to expire (JTA 1987c). The issue of respecting the existing contracts with South Africa was also reiterated by the Israeli premier Yitzhak Shamir when he talked with the US Secretary of State George Shultz (JTA 1987b). Amid this, leaders such as Arens condemned the American moves of forcing Israel to impose sanctions on South Africa.

As a follow-up to the above sanction, Israel, on 16 September 1987, unveiled a comprehensive sanction banned further agreements in the field of science, visits, investments, etc., but did not mention anything on existing arms contracts (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 204). The calculative omission of issues related to military sales was perhaps due to the confidence Israel gained over the period of time while conducting clandestine military contracts with South Africa. This time, too, it might have thought that it could go unnoticed. The sanction, in fact, did not really hinder the military relations between Israel and South Africa. Officials from military establishments carefully preserved their time-tested military ties and did as much as they could to earn out of their secret dealings. However, this was short-lived as both the countries were once again blamed for conducting another missile test in 1989. This shocked the Western countries, especially the US which was under the impression that Israel was following the sanctions. A few had negated this report as they were based entirely on speculations and leaks from officials in the US (Steinberg 1993). In one of the

investigations by the UN, no direct link between Israel and South Africa's development of missile was found, but mentioned that Israel possessed the know-how to assist such a programme. It appeared that Israel had successfully distanced itself from the *apartheid* regime only in the eyes of the media (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 214).

By the time when the Cold War was approaching its end, even Israel began to realise the changing dynamics of international politics. South African, too, was moving towards democracy. In 1991, while South Africa signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Israel had decided to abide by the conditions of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and to limit its transfers of missile weaponry and military technologies to other countries (Williams 1991a). Israel was pressurised to adhere to the MTCR because of the growing irritation of the Bush administration over its reported missile dealings with South Africa and China.

Israel carefully navigated its arms sales diplomacy with South Africa's *apartheid* regime. Till today, this is one of the most interesting military relations ever forged by Israel. What remains interesting is the fact of these ties had the ability to continue the military cooperation despite the 1977 UN arms embargo against South Africa. Israel had begun to sell arms to South Africa right after the 1963 UN arms embargo (Mehlman, Thomas *et al.* 1979: 582). In the presence of these embargoes, Israel successfully conducted its clandestine military assistance to South Africa. While the diplomatic breach it faced from the Sub-Saharan African nations after the June and October Wars became a critical setback, Israel's relations with South Africa seemed to be more lucrative in terms of its arms exports.

## Conclusion

Arms sales diplomacy backed by military-related programmes sustained Israel's relations with South Africa for more than a decade. The Israelis even defied the US imposed anti-*apartheid* act and embargo of 1987. In terms of the nature of their ties, this particular military cooperation had been the most complete one as it covered a wide canvas of areas, ranging from military training to the most-controversial nuclear weapons cooperation. Israel tried almost all the possible forms of military relations with the *apartheid* regime, including joint-productions. South Africa had the privilege



of accessing most of the latest military items developed by Israel, and unlike other cases, there was a visible reciprocity between the two countries.

It is undeniable that military cooperation between Israel and South Africa could be considered as the most important aspect of their overall ties. The centrality of this cooperation lies in the fact that the bilateral relations plunged to all-time low from mid-1990s onwards. By April 1994, when the ANC came to power by abolishing the *apartheid* regime, Israel's military cooperation with South Africa was almost non-existent. Both the countries began to discuss more of civilian cooperation. There were several factors that led to the dwindling of military-security ties and the changing geopolitics that ushered in during the last phase of the Cold War was one of them. This was clubbed with that of transforming politics in South Africa as well as in the US vis-à-vis the *apartheid* regime. Out of these factors, the US role had been the most successful in curtailing Israel's military cooperation with South Africa.

Most of the military relations forged by Israel had a third party dimension, namely the US and many countries between 1960s and 1970s wanted to get closer to the US through Israel, and South Africa was no exception. As there was a significant Soviet penetration in the African continent during the Cold War period, the US wanted to use South Africa to keep a check on the former's activities in countries like Angola. For that reason, it promoted Israel's military sales and other related assistance to South Africa, and it consciously remained silent. However, with the changing geopolitical landscape since the end of the 1980s, the US had to intervene in most of Israel's military affairs. With the end of the Cold War, the US no longer needed Israel as a counterweight to Soviet influence in Africa. The growing discontent, moreover, within the US with regard to the *apartheid* rule made it adopt a strict imposition on Israel to stop arms sales to South Africa. In April 1994, when the ANC came to power in South Africa and abolished the *apartheid* system, military ties with Israel came to an end.

The US continued to play an important role in determining Israel's arms exports policies. This was witnessed during Israel's military sales to countries in Latin America, and a few Asian countries. The following chapter examines the inevitable role of the US on Israel's arms export policies.

# Chapter Five

## The US Factor

This chapter discusses the role played by the United States (US) in Israel's arms exports and begins with the evolution of their relations, particularly their military cooperation. In this regard, different phases of the relations have been highlighted, leading to increasing reliance on the US for military assistance. This chapter also addresses the leverage enjoyed by the US due to its status as the largest aid provider. The US, depending upon strategic calculation, influenced and often facilitated Israel's arms exports during the Cold War era. However, with the end of the Cold War, it started to see the latter as a potential strategic competitor in the international arms market and, vetoed sales of certain types of weapons systems. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis on the state of affairs between the two countries during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the principal focus of this research.

### Early Phase

Within minutes after the State of Israel was declared, the US President Harry Truman granted *de-facto* recognition and *de-jure* recognition was granted on 31 January 1949 (National Archives 1978). Despite this quick recognition, the military dimension remained largely absent during the first twenty years. The US officials were against providing arms as it would provoke the Arab states to turn towards the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for weapons (Bard 1988: 50-51).

The US imposed an arms embargo as early as in 1947 on the shipments of arms to Palestine and other Arab states in the region to prevent conflict, or "in the event of conflict" (Reich 1984: 155). Despite Truman's recognition of Israel in 1948, this arms embargo was not lifted. The US had two primary objectives in West Asia as the Cold War intensified. Firstly, it wanted to safeguard the supply of oil to the West; and secondly, it wanted to prevent the penetration of the USSR into West Asian region (Rodman 2007: 3). As a result, the US did not want to disturb its relations with the Arab states by supplying military equipment to Israel. Although the US did not ignore

it completely, its foreign policy was more inclined towards favouring the Arab countries due to oil and Cold War considerations.

The creation of Israel coincided with the beginning of the Cold War between the West and the East. However, the arch-rivals supported the establishment of Israel, voted in favour of the Partition of the Palestine and the creation of the Jewish State and in May 1949 endorsed its admission into the United Nations (UN). Israel was a rare issue of agreement between them in the early days of Cold War (Shlaim 2004: 658). The newly established country adopted a policy of “non-identification”, and wanted to cultivate ties with “all freedom loving states”, including the US and the Soviet Union (Bialer 1990: 1).

Another reason as to why Israel showed reluctance to take sides in the emerging Cold War was its “internal political and ideological makeup” (Ibid: 9-53). For example, Mapam, the left-wing or Marxist-Zionist party, and the Labour Mapai looked up to Soviet Russia for inspiration and guidance in international affairs. As a result of such non-identification policy, a certain balance could be persevered between the ruling party Mapai and left-wing coalition political partners. Israel’ first Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett was also a principle proponent of non-identification with either of the contending opponents of the Cold War (Shlaim 2004: 655). Similarly, the first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, also promoted Sharett’s idea of keeping all options open. Considering the rising Arab hostility after May 1948, although a pro-West, Ben-Gurion wanted to cultivate good relations not only with the US but also with the Soviet Union. As Israel’s isolation was widening in West Asia, its leaders wanted to gain external support from both the superpowers by avoiding an explicit identification only with the US or the West.

Avi Shlaim pointed out four main reasons for Israel’s reluctance to side with any of the superpowers:

One was Israel’s sense of responsibility for the fate and welfare of Jews everywhere. Second, there was Israel’s desperate need for aliyah, immigration, coupled with the fact that the two rival blocs contained large numbers of Jews. Third, Israel’s involvement in a bitter conflict with its neighbours made it vital to secure access to arms. The Eastern bloc served as the country’s main arms supplier during the War of Independence, but there was the hope and the expectation of acquiring arms from the Western bloc, as well. Fourth, from the very beginning

Israel was heavily dependent on external economic aid. The United States was the most coveted source of aid, but prudence dictated keeping all options open (Ibid: 658).

Despite the adherence to non-identification policy, the Korean crisis of 1950 forced a departure.

When the crisis flared up in the Korean Peninsula, Israel was asked by the US to abandon its non-identification policy and move closer to the US (Shichor 1994:189). Ben-Gurion even condemned the North Korean aggression at the UN and this led to a rift between his party and the left-wing members of the Knesset (Shlaim 2004: 659). Although Ben-Gurion's government did not send any troops to Korea under the UN banner, Israel's decision to align with the US marked its breakaway from non-the identification policy.

Scholars like Michael Brecher were of the view that Israel's shift towards the West was "catalysed by the need for arms and economic need, rationalised by the perception of renewed Soviet hostility, and eased by the indifference of the Third World" (Brecher 1972: 561). In addition, Shlaim enumerated three reasons for Ben-Gurion's increasing tilt towards the West. Firstly, the dwindling number of immigrants to Israel from Eastern Europe became a set-back as that could not earn goodwill and support of the Soviet Union. Secondly, Ben-Gurion wanted to woo the support of the whole American Jewry and by moving away from the Soviet Union, he could enhance his country's appeal to the American Jews. Thirdly, he wanted American backing while seeking reparation from the Federal Republic of Germany for the ill-treatments of the Jewish people during the Holocaust (Shlaim 2004: 661).

As a result of these developments, the abandonment of non-identification was largely shaped by the prevailing international circumstances at the time. Moreover, the intensification of the Cold War made it difficult for Israel to remain without the support of one of the two rivals. Simultaneously, pressure was building up within the US administration to "step up its demands on those nations which had not identified themselves with the USA in the global struggle" (Bialer 1990: 212).

Israel's shift from its non-identification approach paved the way for closer relations with the US. From the early 1950s, it began lobbying for its inclusion in the "Western

plans for the defence of the Middle East”, but it was rebuffed (Shlaim 1999: 176). There were also certain developments in the region that altered its policies. The rising hostility of the Arab world and the need for a reliable security guarantor made Israel tilt towards the US. However, Israel-US relations were not strong during the first two decades of their diplomatic engagement. The period between 1948 and mid-1950s were visibly cold, both politically and militarily.

The US was reluctant to supply arms as it wanted to forge cooperation with the Arab states in its efforts to prevent the penetration of Soviet Union in West Asia. Moreover, the policy of the US was to preserve military balance and did not want to arm Israel as it thought the latter was strong enough without its arms, and its “military might easily exceed that of all of its principle adversaries combined, especially with regard to its air force” (Goldman 2009: 28). The success of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) during the Suez Crisis reinforced this belief of the US. This reluctance had already been manifested by its unwillingness to revoke the aforementioned arms embargo against Israel and other Arab states imposed in 1947. Simultaneously, other Western powers such as Britain and France also wanted to reduce the supply of arms to West Asian countries, particularly, after the establishment of the state of Israel (Young and Kent 2013: 76). Finally, on 25 May 1950, the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and the US issued the Tripartite Declaration to regulate security situation in West Asia, and arms sales in particular. This declaration read:

The three governments take this opportunity of declaring their deep interest in and their desire to promote the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the area and their unalterable position to the use of force or threat of force between any of the states in that area. The three governments, should they find that any of these states was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently, with their obligations as member of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation (US State Department 1952-1954: 405-406).

Israel, around this time, needed an arms supplier as the Arab governments were trying to procure arms from all the available sources, including the US and the USSR. This did result into success as both these superpowers were more interested in gaining the supports of the Arab countries.

The rising hostility of the Arab states became a major concern for Israel. The Western arms embargo severely “jeopardised its chances for survival in the face of the Arab invasion” (Slonim 1987: 136). The American refusal to supply military items led to its forging of closer relations with France. Right after 1948, France “embarked on what amounted to a policy of military and scientific cooperation with the new state” (Crosbie 1974: 3). The military aspect of the ties, which Israel and France developed from the mid-1950s, was not possible vis-à-vis the US.

Despite the efforts to maintain arms balance in West Asia, a few of the Arab states continued to receive arms from the signatories of the Tripartite Declaration because of their prior commitments (Reiser 1989: 21). For instance, Jordan received weapons and trainings from Great Britain under the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1948; Saudi Arabia received arms from the US; and France and Italy continued to provide arms to Egypt (Peres 1970: 34). In the absence of a formal arrangement with the Western power, Israel was left without an arms supplier. As a result, from mid-1950s, it began to push for better relations with the US and obtaining US-made arms became an important foreign policy objective.

Ben-Gurion made concerted efforts to persuade the US that his country be considered as a strategic asset in the fight against Soviet expansion in West Asia (Shlaim 1999: 178). No major breakthrough was witnessed. In the words of Zach Levey:

America’s centrality to Israel meant that its leadership was willing to consider ties with the US of a nature which could not be contemplated with the two other Western powers. Thus, Israel’s view during the early 1950s that the strategic balance in the region was tilting rapidly in the Arab’s favour brought the Israelis in late 1954 to seek a security guarantee from the United States (Levey 1995a: 43).

Prime Minister Sharett, in June 1955, told the Knesset, about Israel’s desire for a ‘mutual defence and security treaty’ with the US. Securing such guarantee from the US was an option before because alongside various advantages, such as military edge, Israel was cautious about its ability to act independently in its own region when its regional interests were at stake. Ben-Gurion feared that sovereignty might be compromised because of extreme reliance on the US for all the security issues (Ibid: 44). The prospects for purchasing arms were better if Israel would be included in a defence pact. As a result, many leaders began to feel that securing American arms

became an important foreign policy goal. Just before the statehood of Israel, Czechoslovakia was the supplier of arms and this continued till 1951 (Bialer 1985b: 307-315). This source did not remain for long as there was reorientation in the policies of the Czechs due to Korean crisis. Thereafter, Israel's need for a reliable arms supplier increased.

Israel submitted its first request for arms from the US in mid-1953, and this included 25 155mm Howitzers, 30 105mm, 12 3-inch, and 12 90mm anti-aircraft gun (Levey 1995a: 46). The US rejected all of these except the last item along with an agreement to supply spare parts. In June 1954, the US again rejected another request for the purchase of 24 American F-86 jets. In this year, the US and Iraq entered into an agreement for a programme of direct military aid to Iraq. The US was of the view that release of arms to Israel would violate the agreements of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration, and such acts would have been considered as granting superiority to Israel over the Arab states. According to the US estimation, in 1953, Israel had 122 medium tanks against a combined total of 216 for the Arab states, and 35 light tanks as against 54 in the Arab countries (Ibid.). As a result, Israel was unhappy with the attitude of the US, and it began to raise concerns, and the refusal to supply arms paved the way for strong ties between Israel and France (Ziv 2010: 418, 420, 422, 425).

Israel was similarly sidelined by the US from being a part of the Baghdad Pact of 1955, the main security structure for West Asia that included Great Britain, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq. The main objective of this pact was to fight against the Soviet penetration of West Asia and it was the result of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Dietl 1986, Sanjian 1997: 226). Despite the interest, Israel was kept out of Baghdad Pact. This pact not only lessened Israel's chances to acquire American-made arms but caused a considerable strain with the US. Its interests in the Arab world precluded the US from considering the case.

Due to these developments, there were uncertainties over Israel's periodic requests for arms. Although the American officials did not act immediately, they started to voice their concerns over Czech-Egyptian arms deal that was signed on 27 September 1955. The Soviet's arms supply to Egypt via Czechoslovakia was actually facilitated by the Baghdad Pact, particularly after the US spurned Egypt's request for American arms

(Rodman 2007: 3). The Soviet move to supply arms to Egypt, and other Arab states, was “political” as it “wishes to increase its prestige and influence at the expense of the West and to disrupt Western alliances” (Ramazani 1959: 357).

Secretary of Defence Charles Wilson talked of a prompt decision on Israel’s demand for arms (JTA 1955a), and this fundamentally altered the US policies in November 1955. As noted by Gulshan Dietl reflecting the Egypt-Soviet arms:

The arms deal with Egypt clearly signified a new method of Soviet advance in a different territory. It opened up a new front in the Cold War in the Middle East with the emergence of the Soviet Union as a Middle Eastern power (Dietl 1986: 82).

Military items supplied by Soviet to Egypt included the following: 100-150 MiG Jet fighters, including both MiG-15 and MiG-17 varieties; 50 Ilyushin (IL) bombers; 70-Il-14 transport aircraft; anti-aircraft guns; training and liaison aircraft; 230 T-34 tanks; 200 armoured personnel carriers; and 600 artillery pieces, including Russian-made semi-automatic rifles’ self-propelled guns, howitzers, medium guns, and anti-tank guns; and destroyers, submarines and torpedo boats (Golani 1998: 13, Bar-on 1994: 16-17, Ziv 2010: 418). Considering the volume of the arms transfers, this deal has been considered a watershed event in West Asia during the time.

In response to the Czech deal, Israel wanted military equipments from the US as it had to face the weapons systems supplied by the Soviets, such as tanks. For instance, it sought to counter the tanks procured by Egypt from the USSR with American-made Patton tank as Britain refused to sell its Centurion tank. Further, as Israel could not get British-made Hunter or French-made Mystere-4 jets, it wanted American-made F-86 Sabre to face the Soviet-supplied Egyptian Mig-15 jets. The US-made arms were preferred as the US government could give a long-term credit to any purchases (Levey 1995a: 44). This was not the case with Britain and France as it had to pay in cash for all the arms imported. These factors attributed to Israel’s constant efforts to receive military assistance from the US, mostly arms. The quest for American arms increased especially after the Czech deal. Against this backdrop, Israel began to think in terms of a preventive war as its arch-rival was armed sufficiently (Golani 1995: 803).



The Eisenhower administration (1953-1961) refused to sell arms to Israel even after Czech deal. Moreover, Dulles indicated that the US had no immediate plans to provide arms to maintain a balance and offset Soviet arms shipments to Egypt (Dietl 1986: 75-77, JTA 1955b). At this juncture, the question emerged as to whether the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 did not obligate the US to make arms available to Israel to maintain a balance of power. As a result, Dulles emphasised on the two concepts of the declaration, that is, the desire to avoid a power imbalance and the desire to prevent an arms race. He considered the deal as “business of second-hand arms” between Egypt and the Soviet bloc and, as a result, it became hard to judge whether such weapons would considerably increase Egypt’s military strength (JTA 1955b). Although the administration knew that this arms deal could increase the risk of Israel launching a “preventive war”, it maintained its “benign indifference” and refused to Israel’s accede to request for arms (Goldman 2009: 30).

While the US had begun to give financial assistance to Israel from 1949 with a US\$100 Export-Import Bank Loan (Sharp 2007: 2), there were no arms sales until early 1960s. The US granted its first military loan worth US\$0.4 million to Israel in 1959, and this value shot up to US\$13.2 million in 1962 (Clyde 2003b: 13, Israel 2013). For the period between 1949 and 1983, the US aid was estimated at US\$25 billion; out of which more than US\$16.5 billion was in military loans and grants; more than US\$6.5 billion in economic loans and grants under the Security Assistance Program and the rest fell in other categories (General Accounting Office 1983).

Before the entry of the US as the major arms supplier, it was France which had been the principle arms supplier until President Charles de Gaulle imposed arms embargo in the wake of the June 1967 War. Arms sales promoted and consolidated their relations, and later on developed a strong political and military cooperation. Both Israel and France shared an animosity towards Egypt, and especially due to the latter’s intervention in Algeria. Shimon Peres, who became Director-General of the Defence Ministry in 1954, was a key player in establishing strong military ties with France, particularly on a mutual agreement to topple Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser. Both the countries entered into a major arms deal in June 1956, and this was increased after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal on 26 July.

Eventually, the refusal by the US to supply arms and the exclusion of Israel from the Baghdad Pact prompted the latter to join with Britain and France and initiated the tripartite invasion of Egypt on 29 October 1956. The US condemned all the three countries for the attack, and Eisenhower particularly pressurised Israel to withdraw from Sinai and Gaza Strip. Initially, Ben-Gurion refused to withdraw from the Egyptian territory as President Nasser rejected his conditions of free passage to Israeli vessel through the Straits of Tiran at the mouth of Gulf of Aqaba (Little 1993: 564). This crisis plunged Israel-US relations into a visible low where Eisenhower even threatened to support UN sanctions unless the latter evacuated all the Egyptian territories it captured.

Finally, on 16 March 1957, Israel decided to withdraw from all the Egyptian territories when the US affirmed its right to passage through the Straits of Tiran, and the UN agreed to station forces along its border with Egypt to serve as a buffer between the two countries (Freedman 2009b: 255). The decisive victory during the Suez Crisis raised its image as an emerging regional military power, while that of Britain and France were gradually collapsing. The downfall of these two super powers gave an opportunity for the Soviet Union to make further advances into West Asia. Such developments had made the US rethink its policies towards Israel vis-à-vis its interests in the region and began to take up responsibility of preserving the “Western position, which comprised strategic bases and petroleum fields in the area” (Reiser 1989: 39).

The US refrained from arming Israel due to its sensitivity towards certain strategic interests, particularly, its identification with Saudi Arabia and its oil reserves coupled with the need to thwart complicating the “NATO allies’ traditional ties to Israel’s Arab enemies” (Lewis 1999: 366). With the increasing penetration of the Soviet Union into the region, it had begun to gradually adopt increasingly pro-Israeli stance from the mid-1960s, and by the late 1960s, both had entered into intense negotiations for the purchase of American-made weapons systems.

The framework for improved relations between Israel and the US was laid following the Iraqi revolution of 1958. The US began to admire the democratic values preserved by Israel in an increasingly volatile West Asian region (Freedman 2009b: 255). It did

not want to rely anymore on the Arab countries as a counterweight to the Soviet penetration into the region. Despite the tension with the Suez Crisis, both the countries began a slow process of rapprochement based on a mutual desire to contain “radical Arab nationalism”, and this had come about as the American officials were very impressed by the “overwhelming military defeat the Israelis inflicted on Soviet-backed Egyptian troops” (Little 1993: 564).

Under the 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine, the US Congress empowered the president to dispense US\$200 million in economic and military aid and to use military force to defend any West Asian country seeking assistance against international communism (Hahn 2006: 40). This change reflected mounting concerns of the US in the wake of the growing Soviet influence in the region and such Cold War calculations led to its willingness to invigorate Israel’s security needs though it materialised only in the early 1960s. This was because the US officials began to realise that a well-armed Israel could play an effective role in preventing the Soviet influence throughout the region.

The Eisenhower Doctrine paved the way for the improvement of the relations:

A country could request American economic assistance and/or aid from US military forces if it was being threatened by armed aggression from another state. Eisenhower singled out the Soviet threat in his doctrine by authorizing the commitment of US forces ‘to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism (US State Department 1957).

The changing perception of the US during the late 1950s was summed up by Abraham Ben-Zvi in the following words:

... It is clear that the vision of Israel as strategic asset to American regional interests had started to permeate the thinking of Washington’s high-policy elite during the second half of the 1950s. Indeed, during the period following the Sinai War of 1956 it became increasingly clear to the architects of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s foreign policy that their initial hopes of consolidating a broadly based alliance in the Middle East that would effectively deter Soviet encroachment could not be reconciled with the actual dynamics of a recalcitrant region, whose main actors remained indifferent to American priorities and objectives... (Ben-Zvi 2004a: 30).

The hopes of the US to form an alliance with the Arabs to contain the Soviet threat shattered as there emerged inter-Arab rivalries and increasingly anti-West posture. This was in contrast to what the Eisenhower administration was hoping for.

With turmoil looming over the Arab world, the US began to visualise a long-term strategy which would enable it sustain its presence in the region, and warming up to Israel appeared to be a possible option. Meanwhile, what had added thrust to thawing of relations up was the Jordanian crisis that erupted in July 1958. Israel's willingness to assist in preserving the Hashemite regime from the Egyptian and Syrian forces improved its image as a reliable security partner. It was the threat to the existence of the Hashemite Kingdom that made Eisenhower rely upon Israel's "balancing behaviour vis-à-vis Egypt (manifested primarily by the pursuit of the strategies of deterrence and coercion as its central tools for restraining President Nasser's activities in Jordan) as a major reinforcement of its overall containment strategy in the region" (Ibid 2007: 7). During the crisis, Israel allowed vital US military shipments to Jordan via its airspace, and supported the decision of Britain to dispatch 2,200 of its paratroopers from Cyprus to protect Amman (Ibid 1998: 77).

Ben-Gurion's agreement to side with the US during the Jordanian crisis, unlike Saudi Arabia, was regarded as a significant contribution in the preservation of American interests. He helped the US with an aim to gain military-security assistance. Eisenhower, who earlier considered Israel as an obstacle to the initiative of forming inter-Arab security alliance with the West, labelled "communist imperialism" with a combination of "Arab nationalism" as propagated by Egypt's Nasser as the "most serious and real danger to Western interests and designs" in the region (Ibid 2007: 42).

Despite the assistance, the Eisenhower administration did not abandon its policy of refusing the sale of sophisticated military hardware to Israel but his administration started reconsidering the demands. Political figures like Dulles were quite supportive of this move. He praised Israel's emerging role as a bulwark of international order in West Asia, and emphasised on this as an opportune moment to review the overall relations. During mid-1958, Peres visited Washington with a shopping list that included rifles, half-tracks, tanks, submarines and helicopters, but the Pentagon did

not accede to such requests. The US officials felt that Israel possessed qualitative military superiority over the combined forces of the United Arab Republic (UAR) formed by the unity of Egypt and Syria as well as Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Little 1993: 566). The US was worried that sales of the military hardware might affect the delicate relations it shared with the rest of the West Asian countries. At this juncture, proponents of arms sales in the US administration reminded of the Jewish State's assistance during the Jordanian crisis and this marked the loosening up of US policy on arms sales (Ibid., Ben-Zvi 2007).

### The Evolution

The call for arms sales to Israel gained momentum in the late 1950s. On 26 August 1958, the US informed that it could purchase about 100 recoilless rifles but granted no permission for other sophisticated military hardware, including tanks (Little 1993: 566). In the same year, the US agreed to sell 20 Sikorsky helicopters. Early the following year, two Congressmen supported an amendment to the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee to restore Israel to the list of nations to receive direct US grant assistance under the foreign aid programme (JTA 1959a). The US earlier removed it from the list of nations which were scheduled to receive grants-in-aid on the grounds that the latter made economic progress and there was no need for such aid (Ibid.). Later that year, the US agreed to provide US\$100 million in technical and financial assistance for the next two years. This was the largest American aid since 1948 (Little 1993: 567).

In the words of Chester Bowles, a Democrat representative and a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee:

... The apparent cutback in aid to Israel under the Mutual Security program is disturbing to many of us. I know of no nation that more clearly fits the standards... for the allocation of economic assistance. Israel is a symbol of what a free people can achieve. I am confident that this question will be fully explored in the Foreign Affairs Committee and consideration given to special language in the Committee report designed to correct this situation... (JTA 1959a).

Looking at Israel's democracy and stability, the US administration had started to lay importance on forming military relation. The Kennedy administration showed certain flexibilities, and prospects for arms sales increased. John F. Kennedy, like

Eisenhower, could not do much during his early days due to opposition from the State Department that remained adamant on reassessing arms sales to Israel (Little 1993: 563-564).

The idea of the US roping in Israel on the mere grounds of having a stable democratic establishment was challenged by scholars such as Bat-Ami Zucker. He countered this line of argument by suggesting that:

... a Jewish population of less than two and a half million (at that time) could hardly be counted upon as a strategic asset in the face of many Arab states that criticised any and all American assistance to Israel as a menace to their own well-being. Moreover, in a period when courting the Arab countries was deemed necessary to bring them into the Western defence system, and when Europe was still totally dependent on these countries for its oil, it would seemingly have made more strategic sense to let Israel stand on its own (Zucker 1992: 567).

During the earlier year, the U.S. administration did not want to provide security assistance because it considered the latter as a burden and obstacles to its friendly ties with the Arab countries. He felt that it was more of broader American foreign policy objectives than containment of Soviet influence that facilitated its burgeoning support for Israel.

On 9 February 1960, Israel requested the US for some arms in the light of significant growth of Arab capacity (US State Department 1960i). One can attribute three main reasons for the request. Firstly, there seemed to be a gap in the quality of the military materials possessed by Israel. Secondly, there were visible differences in the quantities of material. Thirdly, there was an absence of advance warning systems to thwart any possible air attacks. Some of the arms which were requested included 100 latest models of aircraft, 530 tanks, 300 armoured cars, 60 howitzers, 250 recoilless rifles, 600 missiles of the Sidewinder and Hawk types, two small submarines and a large quantity of electronic equipment (US State Department 1960j). The US officials seemed to believe that Israel did not actually expect the former to supply them with all the arms but might have expected to procure at least electronic needs, “and then to some extent subsidize through indirect means their purchase of aircraft and heavy armament from French or other non-American sources” (US State Department 1960j). Therefore, among the weapons systems requested, Israel was keen on acquiring the Hawk missiles. Ben-Gurion believed that Egypt’s Nasser would “finish Israel” using

MiG-19s in a surprise attack. US Secretary of State Christian A. Herter said, “The US would consider the Israeli request ‘sympathetically and urgently’” (US State Department 1960g).

A major breakthrough in the Israeli-US relations came about after the visit of Ben-Gurion to Washington on 10 March 1960 and his meetings with Eisenhower and other American officials (JTA 1960). During his meetings with the American leaders, Ben-Gurion expressed his concerns over the possible air raid by the UAR, and the need for anti-aircraft missiles to counter surprise attacks (US State Department 1960h). Out of the many items listed, only missiles and aviation electronic equipment were available with the US. The Under-Secretary of the State Department repeatedly informed Ben-Gurion that military authorities were studying the arms request and this opened the opportunities for the purchase of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles (Little 1993: 569; Ben-Zvi 2004).

No major breakthrough could be achieved as the US still considered that the former had military superiority over its neighbours. In April 1960, US Under-Secretary C. Douglas Dillon said that the anti-aircraft missiles were “unavailable in terms of the immediacy with which Israel had asserted its requirements”, but the request could be met sometime in 1963 or 1964 (US State Department 1960f). He emphasised that the US could first supply electronic warning systems which could expand Israel’s air defence capability significantly.

In the words of Secretary Christian A. Herter:

...While the Hawk system is purely defensive, it is easy to imagine that some other outside power, anxious to exacerbate tensions in the Near East, would yield to the importunities (is this the actual word in the statement?) of Israel’s apprehensive neighbours and equip them with missile weaponry, including perhaps missiles with surface-to-surface capability. In this event, since the Hawk system cannot defend them against a missile attack, Israel’s acquisition of Hawk missiles would be largely wasted time and a heavy expense. A new spiral in the Near East arms race would have taken place—without benefit to anyone except an outside power which has long coveted that area and which stands to benefit by Israel and Israel’s neighbours dissipating their limited resources on unproductive and fabulously expensive weaponry... (US State Department 1960b).

Israel did not agree to the above arguments and reiterated the urgency of acquiring missiles. Foreign Minister Meir acknowledged the production difficulties of the US but urged “that Israel be assured now that Hawks would be supplied when they became available” (US State Department 1960d). She wanted the US to train military personnel so that they would have the technical knowledge when the missiles became available.

Around this time, the news about Israel’s nuclear programme in Dimona disturbed the US (US State Department 1960a). As a result Israel’s refusal to share information on this programme, the Hawk case was temporarily put on hold (Tal 2000: 309). Kennedy raised the issue of Dimona when he met Ben-Gurion in New York 30 May 1961, and showed reluctance to sell arms. An intensified discussion for Hawk missile sales, estimated at US\$50 million, began in early 1961 (US State Department 1961c). This came about after the Soviet Union agreed to supply systems such as MiG- 19s, MiG-21 jets and IL-28 bombers to Iraq and the UAR (Goldman 2009: 35, 40 and 43). Kennedy reiterated his hesitation to introduce such military systems to the region but Ben-Gurion argued that they would be used only as a defensive weapon and hence did not pose any threats to other countries in the region (US State Department 1961c).

Kennedy’s decision, in August 1962, to sell Hawk missiles was one of the most important events in the evolving relations (US State Department 1962a) and reflected a policy shift. Kennedy’s realisation that the US could possibly achieve military balance in the region drove him to adopt this changed policy. In the words of Ben-Zvi:

... The sale in August 1962 of six batteries of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel finally translated the largely unstructured and latent partnership into a concrete form of collaboration, thus predicating the American-Israeli framework upon far less amorphous and opaque premises... (Ben-Zvi 2004a: 30).

In September 1962, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Philip Talbot announced the sale of Hawk missiles to Israel. While informing this breakthrough to the UAR Ambassador to the US Mostafa Kamel, Talbot stressed that there was no change in US policy with regard to its long-range cooperation with the UAR. However, he did not forget to mention that the Soviet-backed forces were the bigger threat to Israel than the Arabs (US State Department



1962b). The decision was a significant departure as the US accepted Israel's view that the Egyptian military build-up posed a threat to its security. Inflow of large shipments of Soviet-made bombers and missiles to Egypt led to this decision.

It is imperative to understand the Cold War strategy of the US in seeing Israel as a country that could act as a balancer against the Soviet-backed Arab states in West Asia (Goldman 2009). The US was not very keen to supply sophisticated military hardware but prevailing geopolitical factors compelled it to do so. The Hawk missile deal laid the framework for further cooperation and both the countries began to explore further opportunities. Before the outbreak of the June War, there were two major events that enhanced their military relations. One was the US sale of M-48 Patton tanks in 1965 and second was that of Skyhawk bombers in 1966. These three deals, namely, Hawk, Patton tanks and Skyhawk bombers, led to the establishment of a patron-client relationship, owing to which, the US began wielding major influence over Israel's arms export policies.

After the clinching of the Hawk missile deals, the successor administration under Lyndon B. Johnson made some efforts to enhance military relations. His decision to supply Patton tanks was an important characteristic of his pro-Israeli stance (Tominaga 2010). This was the first time the US supplied offensive weapons systems to Israel. Apart from domestic and bilateral considerations, a few regional developments in West Asia influenced the US decision to sell Patton tanks. The Soviet Union had continued to supply arms such as tanks, fighters, torpedo boats and submarines to its Arab clients. Concern over Israel's efforts to develop long-range surface-to-surface missiles and nuclear capabilities was another factor which pushed the US for the tank deal (Rodman 2004b).

Discussions regarding Patton tanks began between late 1963 and early 1964 when Israel requested for additional military assistance from the US as it faced both quantitative and qualitative challenges against the Soviet-made systems such as T-54 and Stalin-3 tanks with the Arab states, especially that of UAR (US State Department 1964g). Qualitative challenge emerged as UAR was getting more numbers of T-54's, and they out-classed anything in Israel's tank inventory in all respects; fire power, armour and manoeuvrability. Due to this increasing military strength of the Arabs,

Israel faced a quantitative problem. Hence, the need to maintain a ratio against Arab tanks cropped up and it wanted about 200 Patton tanks (US State Department 1964g).

Along with the request for tanks, Israel also sought surface-to-surface missiles and naval equipments. There were issues over Israel's ability to pay for these arms at regular terms and the US requested information on how it would spend its defence budget. Ambassador Avraham Harman emphasised on the urgency of Israel to procure such systems (US State Department 1964f). After intense discussions between the two countries, the US began to show some willingness to sell Patton tanks. In January 1964, US Joint Chief of Staff, expressed that "Replacement of 300 of Israel's present M-4 tanks is militarily sound on the basis of modernisation, and the types requested are appropriate to Israeli needs", but "a net increase in Israel's tank inventory is not presently justified" (US State Department 1964e).

The US reiterated its position of maintaining a balance in its relations and showed a reluctance to identify closely with any of these rivals in West Asia, and the Johnson administration decided to "adopt a middle ground" over Patton tanks to Israel (Rodman 2004b). To avoid confrontation with the Arab countries, the US thought to rope in either Britain or the West Germany to act as conduit but Israel insisted in getting only M-48As (US State Department 1964b). Since the IDF already possessed the British-made Centurion tanks, Israel preferred the German product "which had greater 'autonomy' than the Centurion-that is, it could operate on the battlefield for longer period before having to re-arm and re-fuel" (Rodman 2004b). The Levi Eshkol government also believed that the purchase of this tank would be useful in establishing an "American-Israeli arms pipeline, however roundabout, which Israel could later strengthen" (Ibid 2007: 21).

West Germany was not enthusiastic to become a conduit for US arms sales to Israel as its officials were worried that such large deals could not be kept a secret for a long time. It had robust economic ties with the Arabs at that point of time, and there was a fear that the latter might even recognise the German Democratic Republic. Due to these concerns, it wanted to avoid getting involved in the issue. Pentagon agreed to provide with new and advanced M-48A (3) tanks (Rodman 2004 b, Ben-Zvi 2004a: 48). This arrangement did not last for long as there were media leaks in the US and

Germany, in October 1964, and precipitated a harsh campaign against the government led by Chancellor Ludwig Erhard (Ben-Zvi 2004a:48). In February 1965, West Germany ceased this arms shipment to Israel after delivering 40 tanks. In the wake of this problem, the Levi Eshkol government turned the Johnson administration and argued that the US should consider supplying tanks directly as the European source was not there anymore (US State Department 1965h).

In early 1964 many within the administration supported the idea of selling tanks to Israel. On 26 January, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs Peter Solbert informed Secretary of Defence McNamara about his “approval in principle” for the sale of tanks to Israel through non-US sources (US State Department 1964d). The Johnson administration felt that supplying conventional weapons to Israel could become an important leverage to pressurise the latter to abandon its nuclear arms and halt the development of surface-to-surface missiles (Rodman 2004b). Johnson told Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs and Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff that Israel should give something in writing of its “intentions not to develop nuclear weapons, and by accepting IAEA safeguards on all of its nuclear facilities” (US State Department 1965g). The demands made by the US did not prevent the tank deal, and discussing the reasons, David Rodman observed,

Harriman and Komer’s recommendation that the Johnson administration obligate itself to direct arms sales, as well as soften its demands on nuclear weapons and the Jordan River diversion scheme, combined with the pressure to consummate an arms deal with Jordan before it turned to the Soviet Union, finally broke the impasse over an American-Israeli agreement (Rodman 2004b).

On 10 March 1965, the US and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and the central points of the agreement are found in the clauses II and V:

II. The Government of Israel has reaffirmed that Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Arab-Israel area...

V. It is understood that Israel is not interested in buying some of the particular items sold to Jordan. Instead the United States will sell Israel on favourable credit terms, or otherwise help Israel procure, certain arms and military equipment as follows:

A. The United States will ensure the sale directly to Israel at her request of at least the same number and quality of tanks that it sells to Jordan.

B. In the event of the Federal Government of Germany not supplying to Israel the remainder of the 150 M48 tanks outstanding under the German-Israel tank deal of 1964, the United States will ensure the completion of this program (US State Department 1965f).

Finally, on 29 July, the agreements were ratified by the Johnson administration formally agreed to sell 210 M-48A Patton tanks and other subsystems. The Patton tank sale was an important landmark as it was the first time the US sold offensive arms and paved the way for further sales which ultimately made US the principle arms supplier of Israel after the June War.

After the Patton deal, the US was moving towards becoming an important arms supplier by gradually shedding some of its earlier inhibitions as Israel clinched A-4E Skyhawk fighter and F-4 Phantom aircraft deals, in 1966 and 1968 respectively. While the primary concern of the US was to check the Soviet influence, Israel appropriately utilised Cold War tactics to gain access to American weapons. As the Congress pushed for arms sales, the administration showed caution and reluctance. This tussle became a defining feature in analysing the US pressure on Israeli arms sales policies in later years.

The sale of A-4E Skyhawk fighter was mainly triggered by the threat of King Hussein of Jordan to purchase MIG-21 interceptors either from Egypt or Soviet Union, if the US was unable to provide them with alternatives such as the F-104 aircraft (Ben-Zvi 2004b: 87). As concerns over a regional instability soared and the probable tilt of Jordan towards the Eastern bloc for its military needs became plausible, US had agreed to simultaneously arm both Jordan and Israel.

The US initially balked at becoming the major arms supplier to Israel, or for that matter, to any other Arab countries as it did not want to trigger an arms race in the region. During his meeting with the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in February 1966, McNamara mentioned his inability to sell fighters of any kind to Jordan “unless Israel concurs in the sale and effectively supports it among its friends in the United States, both in and outside of Congress”, and stressed that, “in the absence of Israeli

concurrence and support, the US would not sell aircraft to Jordan” (US State Department 1966b). With regard to the sale to Israel, the US reiterated a few basic conditions:

- (1) that Israel agree to continue to look to Europe for the bulk of its aircraft requirements and not regard the US as a major arms supplier;
- (2) that Israel reiterate its undertaking not to be the first power in the Middle East to manufacture nuclear weapons, and its acceptance of periodic inspection of Dimona;
- (3) that Israel agree not to use any US-supplied aircraft as a nuclear weapons carrier; and
- (4) that Israel agree to full secrecy on all matters until the USG decides when and how to publicize (US State Department 1966b).

The US remained firm in its objective of balancing its ties with the Arabs and refrained from supplying arms to Israel openly. It needed the support of these rival countries to fight against the Soviet expansion, which was its Cold War strategy. Moreover, inspection of the Dimona facilities dominated the bargaining process for the Skyhawk jets, but Israel intermittently showed its reservations over this issue (Ben-Zvi 2004b: 99-101, US State Department 1966b).

However, during the negotiations over the fighter-jet, it became clear to the US that it had to meet the demands of Jordan and Israel. While Hussein continuously hinted at relying on the Arab states or the Soviets to meet its military demand, Israel sought the same from the US. As a result, the US decided to preserve its regional interests and began to discuss the nature of the deal in February 1965, which included timing of deliveries, credit terms, European help, Nasser’s reaction, etc (US State Department 1965i). Eventually, in a move to prevent the influx of Soviet arms to the region, the US decided to opt for a “carefully controlled plane sales to both” (US State Department 1966c).

The US began to discuss its evolving role as the major arms supplier to Israel but it wanted the latter to meet its combat aircraft requirements by purchasing from Western European countries. This was to avoid adverse reactions from the Arab countries. The US was uncertain about the intentions of Jordan and even thought of cancelling its subsidy of US\$50 million if Hussein opted for Soviet-made jets. The US cautiously sought to preserve its interests in the region and agreed to deliver the jets to both the

West Asian countries. Finally, on 22 February 1966, US finalised the sale of 48 A-4E Skyhawk bombers to Israel at the cost of US\$50 million (US State Department 1966a). Further, in May, the State Department announced a new agreement for more Skyhawk jets. These sales were significant not only because the US willingly agreed to sell offensive weapons but it “was the first public acknowledgement that the US was actually selling, the equipment Israel needed to maintain its defences” (Bard 1988: 52).

In the words of Ben-Zvi:

... The cumulative impact of the Hawk deal, the M-48A tank transaction and the Skyhawk sale was the establishment of a *de-facto* patron-client strategic relationship in the American-Israeli sphere *before* the outbreak of the June 1967 War. Indeed, coming in the wake of the M-48A tank deal, the Skyhawk 1966 agreement provide new impetus for predicating the American-Israeli framework upon new political and strategic premises more than a year before the outbreak of the year...(Ben-Zvi 2004a: 55).

The period following the Skyhawk bomber deal marked a significant transition in the relations. The US policy underwent a fundamental change, particularly in its approach to arms sales. Although the US did not immediately become the principle arms supplier, it gradually started to give Israel “a qualitative military edge over its neighbours” (Bard and Pipes 1997).

An important breakthrough came in the wake of the arms embargo imposed by de Gaulle in 1967. Due to the escalation of Arab-Israeli crisis in early 1967, de Gaulle announced suspension of deliveries of war materials for Israel, first unofficially on 3 June 1967 and then officially on 5 June 1967 (Crosbie 1974: 192). He called for a complete ban on all military supplies to Israel on 3 January 1969. Before the imposition of the embargo, France was a major supplier of arms to Israel as the US refused to supply. In 1954, France sold items such as AMX-13 tanks, 75 mm guns, radar equipment, and Ouragan jet fighters; in June 1956, it agreed to sell 72 Mystere jet fighters 200 AMX tanks, 10,000 anti-tank missiles, large volume of ammunition, and decided to 100 Super-Sherman tanks, 200 armoured carried, 300 six-by-six trucks and 20 tank transporters (Ziv 2010: 418, 422, 425).

The embargo had a major impact not only on Israel-US relations but also boosted the rapid development of Israeli defence industry. As discussed in Chapter Two, following the French embargo, Israel started programmes for the indigenous production of aircrafts, tanks, naval crafts, and other materials such as missiles, electronics and subsystems (Sadeh 2011, Steinberg 1986: 164 and Klieman 1984: 12).

France, as a part of the embargo, withheld undelivered orders, even those which Israel had already paid for, including a gunboat being manufactured at Cherbourg and 50 Mirage V aircraft (Klieman 1985: 21). Israel placed the order for Mirage aircrafts in 1966 and completed the payment in 1968 (Crosbie 1974:192). At this juncture when some Arab states were heavily armed by the Soviets, it was left without a reliable arms supplier and had to face severe shortages especially in its air power. As a result, it turned towards US for military assistance, particularly for Phantom aircrafts.

The burgeoning of the arms relationship between Israel and the US in the 1960s was interrupted by the outbreak of the June War. After the war broke out, the Johnson administration froze shipments of arms to Israel and Arab countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, to prevent bloodshed. While some of the consignments for military equipments, which were already in the pipeline before this war, continued towards their destinations, the administration refused to go into further negotiations for new weapons arms sales. This was especially related to major items like tanks and aircrafts.

At the same time, Johnson was disappointed that “Israel had ignored his admonition not to go to war; moreover, he remained committed to a policy of even-handedness and was anxious not to alienate the Arabs who would surely blame the United States for Israel’s aggression” (Bard 1988: 53). His attempt to limit the flow of arms to West Asia failed when the Soviets continued to supply Arab states, namely, Egypt, Syria and Iraq with weapons. Replacement aircrafts were also dispatched to these countries to make for the losses during the war. This caused a considerable alarm to the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, and as a result, an Israeli military mission travelled to the US to discuss issues related to balance of power in the region and the future weapons requirements for the IDF (Rodman 2007: 32). The administration’s policy began to change in early August 1967, and approved the sale of some ammunitions and spare

parts not only to Israel but also to pro-Western Arab countries, including Jordan. The embargo was fully lifted in late October 1967, and Israel requested for 27 more Skyhawk and 50 Phantoms (Bard 1988: 53).

Since the late 1960s, the role of the US as the major “arms supplier to Israel became increasingly important” (Reich 1984: 154). Eshkol’s visit to the US in January 1968 gave a major boost to the negotiations for the sale of the aircrafts.

On both military and diplomatic grounds, the Phantom sale held great significance for Israel. Militarily speaking, the addition of this state-of-the-art aircraft to Israeli order of battle massively upgraded the IAF’s fighting power. Diplomatically speaking, the deal signalled an enhanced American commitment to Israel’s security. Likewise, the sale had very important implications for American foreign policy. It meant that the United States had now chosen, in effect, to become Israel’s principal arms supplier, a role that it had strenuously sought to avoid before the 1967 Six-Day War (Rodman 2004a:130).

The process of finalisation of the aircraft deal was cumbersome.

At the time of the sale, the US was worried about its policies in the region as the deal carried the potential risk of angering the Arabs and the Soviets. The sale of the Phantom jet became a “major test” of its arms supply policy to the region (Reich 1984: 158). Initially, it opposed selling this aircraft as the Johnson administration believed that Israel possessed adequate means to face the Soviet-backed Arabs. Pressures from individual Congressmen coalesced with legislative efforts culminated in the final deal. The US did impose certain conditions including Israel cannot test or deploy strategic missiles without US consent; not to manufacture or acquire the materials without permission; or to sign and ratify the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) (US State Department 1968b).

These conditions became unacceptable to Eshkol, but before the matter worsened, Johnson had agreed to delink the Phantom sale from Israel’s Surface-to-Surface Missiles (SSM) and nuclear-related programmes. This was based on the understanding that Israel would refrain from “publicly declaring or field testing a nuclear device” (Rodman 2004a: 140). He even agreed to ignore a condition, laid down in November 1968, which would give the US a leverage of demanding the return of Phantom if Israel remained non-compliant to the above terms (US State Department 1968d). Finally, on 27 December 1968, the US agreed to sell 50 F-4



Phantom aircrafts along with related spare parts and other equipments. The delivery of 16 aircrafts was slated for end of 1969 and the remaining 34 towards the end of 1970.

The US military supply and the circumstances thereof, highlight the evolution of the relations, wherein the US had moved away from a policy of arms embargo towards Israel to being its significant arms supplier. During the course of this evolution, both countries had witnessed several upheavals, particularly with the US refusing to provide military assistance to Israel openly. The objective to remain as a non-supplier of arms to the region failed as the Soviet Union continued its supplies to the Arab states.

Both the countries tried to make use of one another to satisfy their own strategic interests. The US had an upper hand as it could pressurise Israel to make certain concessions and some of were of the view that “these sales resulted from a consideration of Israel’s needs and from domestic political considerations, not from assessment of US security needs; American officials viewed Israel as lacking the military might to contribute to NATO policy of containment, and so having no role in defending the West” (Bard and Pipes 1997). Due to the larger American interests in the region, arms sales were promoted. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the military-aid provided by the US was mainly in the form of loan which later got converted into grants. In 1970, out of the total aid of US\$93.6 million, military loan was US\$30 million (Sharp 2014: 27). This was a decline from US\$90 million in 1966, and could be attributed to the 1967 war.

With the progression of ties, the influence of the US on Israeli arms exports during the 1970s and 1980s became visible. The 1970s witnessed a visible improvement in the ties. One incident that bolstered their relations was the Jordanian crisis of September 1970 that significantly contributed to the perception of Israel as a strategic asset in the region (Steinberg 2001: 146). The US military assistance increased tremendously after this crisis and aid jumped from US\$76 million in 1968 to US\$600 million in 1971 (Lieber 1998). Relations gained momentum as was evidenced during the October War of 1973. Israel’s military capabilities were strengthened by the US

military aid that jumped from US\$30 million in 1970 to US\$545 million in 1971 and US\$300 million by 1973 (Wheelock 1978: 126).

During the October War, the US supplied a huge quantity of arms to Israel and helped the latter repel the attacks carried out by Syria and Egypt (Ghareeb 1974: 114). Military items supplied during the war included air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles, artillery, crew-served and individual weapons, fighter ordnance, replacement for tanks, aircrafts, radios, etc. It was after this war the US began to search for a reliable partner in the region to counterweight the intensification of the Soviet penetration while Israel's political isolation in the Third World deepened. Thus, the war brought them closer than ever before.

The literature available on this topic considers the October War as the most important turning point in the Israel-US ties (Wheelock 1978, Wunderle and Briere 2008, Rodman 2007, Inbar 1982 Freedman 2009b: 253-295, Reich 1984). After the war, the US quadrupled its foreign aid and emerged as its largest arms supplier (Wunderle and Briere 2008: 49). In 1974, the US military grant to Israel was US\$1.5 billion, and military loan was US\$982.7 million (Sharp 2014: 27). In continuation of the agreement to maintain military balance in West Asia, the US had either provided or agreed to provide Israel with the following defence items: A-4 Skyhawk aircraft, Hawk missiles, F-4 Phantom aircraft, self-propelled howitzers, M60 tanks, M107 SP 175mm long-range artillery, M113A1 armoured personal carriers, CH47 helicopters, TOW missiles, Shrike missiles, Redeye missiles, F-15 aircraft, Lance missiles and laser-guided bombs (Reich 1984: 165).

Efraim Inbar was of the view of that:

After 1973, Israel was more than ever before willing to make territorial sacrifices in order to secure American understanding of its needs. When Israel went along with the American desires in the Middle East, one of its objectives was access to American weaponry. The American interest in reaching the Middle East agreements was used as a lever to secure a satisfactory supply of arms (Inbar 2008: 24).

The transformation since the October War coincided with Israel's search for qualitative superiority over its neighbours and had underlined the urgent need for technologically advanced or sophisticated weapons systems. Then on, arms-supply had emerged as one of the most important aspects of the Israeli-US ties. As their

relations evolved, the US military aid to Israel became one of the most important features of their burgeoning ties. The latter started to receive military technology as well for some of the Research and Development (R&D) projects. It was this assistance which had given enough leverage to the US to influence on Israel's arms exports from the late 1970s. As mentioned by Bernard Reich, "Israel's dependence on U.S. arms and financial assistance is often identified as a potential area of U.S influence (Reich 1984: 168). The following section highlights the nature of their military ties, particularly after the October War, and how the US began to influence on Israel's arms exports.

### Expansion of the Ties

The emergence of the US as a major supplier of arms to Israel from the late 1960s brought a visible transformation in their relations. Beginning with the sale of larger platform such as the Phantom aircraft during this period, the US went on to become the largest military aid provider after the October War. As highlighted above, the role of the US in increasing the military capabilities of Israel was indicated by the types of weapons systems provided during this war. Since then, a heavy flow of arms became one of the salient features of their burgeoning military ties. Weapons which were earlier not available to Israel were provided by the US. **Table 5-1** lists a few major military items delivered by the US.

**Table 5-1: Major Military Items Delivered by the US to Israel between 1971 and 1982 under Foreign Military Sales**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Names of the Systems</b>
<b>Aircraft</b>	355 40 75 216 4 18 8	A-4 Aircraft F-15 Aircraft F-16 Aircraft f-4/RF-4 Aircraft E2C Aircraft AH-1G/S Helicopters CH-53 Helicopters
<b>Ground Forces</b>	711 1,406 5,719 30 249 228 393 114	M48 Series Tanks M60 Series Tanks (200 were M60 A3 Tanks M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers M88A1 Tank Recovery Vehicles M548 Cargo Carriers M577A1 Command Post Carriers M109 155mm Self- Propelled Howitzers M107 175mm Self- Propelled Guns
<b>Surface-to- surface Missile Systems</b>	7 104 1,000 16, 132 520 17,505 100	LANCE Launchers LANCE Missiles DRAGON (Anti-tank) Launchers DRAGON Missiles TOW (Anti-tank) Launchers TOW Missiles Harpoon Missiles
<b>Air Defence Systems</b>	17 895 48 912 48 1048	I-Hawk Batteries I-HAWK Missiles Chaparral Launchers Chaparral Missiles M163 20mm Vulcan Guns REDEYE Missiles
<b>Air-to-air missiles</b>	694 2582	AIM-7 Sparrow Missiles AIM-9 Sidewinder Missiles

<b>Air-to-ground missiles</b>	600 300 769	Maverick Missiles Standard ARM Missiles Shrike ARM Missiles
<b>Surface-to-surface missiles</b>		Harpoon Missiles

Source: General Accounting Office 1983: 16, Joe and Stork 1983: 29, Reich 1984: 167.

From the 1970s, the relationship was increasingly marked by the US supply of sophisticated weapons systems, funding, and transfers of military technologies for R&D programmes. It began to sell a huge quantity of sophisticated weapons systems that were difficult for Israel to purchase from other sources or was economically unavailable (Inbar 2008:24). As a result, the latter began relying on the US for military aid to buy American weapons and equipments (Rivlin 1978: 147). In other words, the US paid for or subsidised the Israeli weapons procurement programme and this ultimately culminated into a patron-client relationship (Rodman 2007: 94-97).

The US military funding and transfers of technologies benefitted Israel's military programmes immensely. A couple of years before the October War, US the military loan stood at US\$545 million but reached US\$982.7 million in 1974 (Reich 1984: 149). With the increase in financial assistance, the cooperation began to be defined by joint collaborations where Israel designed and developed certain weapons systems with the help of US-origin technologies and components. This was particularly so in the field of tanks, fighter jets and missile systems. As the relations expanded rapidly with the help of a strong military back-up, aid and hardware, the military dimension of their cooperation also became a major irritant and even resulted in the US vetoing certain arms exports by Israel. The intervening role of the US is discussed later in this chapter.

The military aid was pursued as part of the US policy of containing the Soviet Union. In the words of Inbar, "Following the 1973 War, the dream of weapon self-sufficiency faded away, together with the aspiration for economic independence. The magnitude of the Israeli dependence upon the US was too overwhelming to entertain any such notion" (Inbar 2008: 33). Procurement of technology became an important aspect of this relationship and with the growth in arms sales as well as financial and

technological assistance, Israel's dependence on the US grew tremendously. **Table 5-2** gives the annual US military aid to Israel between 1974 and 2000.

The supporting role of the US came at a favourable time when Israel's indigenisation programmes were making significant progress. The framework to enhance defence industrial cooperation was made in December 1970, when the Master Defence Development Data Exchange Agreement was signed whereby Israel would be permitted to develop, manufacture, or maintain American-origin defence components and technology (Clarke 1995: 92). This measure permitted the exchange of information considered to be "important to the development of a full range of military systems including tanks, surveillance equipments, electronic warfare, air-to-air surface weapons, and engineering" (Stork and Wenger 1983: 29). In the following year, under an MoU, Israel was permitted to manufacture American-designed defence items. Under such agreements, various components manufactured in the US could be imported to Israel (Mintz and Steinberg 1989: 142).

**Table 5-2: US Military Assistance to Israel (in US\$ million)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total (including economic- related loan and grant</b>	<b>Military Loan</b>	<b>Military Grant</b>
<b>1974</b>	<b>2,621.3</b>	<b>982.7</b>	<b>1,500.0</b>
<b>1975</b>	<b>778.0</b>	<b>200.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1976</b>	<b>2,337.7</b>	<b>750.0</b>	<b>750.0</b>
<b>TQ*</b>	<b>292.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1977</b>	<b>1,762.5</b>	<b>500.0</b>	<b>500.0</b>
<b>1978</b>	<b>1,822.6</b>	<b>500.0</b>	<b>500.0</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>4,888.0</b>	<b>2,700.0</b>	<b>1,300.0</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>2,121.0</b>	<b>500.0</b>	<b>500.0</b>
<b>1981</b>	<b>2,413.4</b>	<b>900.0</b>	<b>500.0</b>
<b>1982</b>	<b>2,250.5</b>	<b>850.0</b>	<b>850.0</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>2,505.6</b>	<b>950.0</b>	<b>750.0</b>
<b>1984</b>	<b>2,631.6</b>	<b>850.0</b>	<b>850.0</b>
<b>1985</b>	<b>3,376.7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,400.0</b>
<b>1986</b>	<b>3,663.5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,722.6</b>
<b>1987</b>	<b>3,040.2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1988</b>	<b>3,043.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1800.0</b>
<b>1989</b>	<b>3,045.6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>3,034.9</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,792.3</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>3,712.3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>3,100.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1993</b>	<b>3,103.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>3,097.2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1995</b>	<b>3,102.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1996</b>	<b>3,144.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>3,132.1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>3,080.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>3,010.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,860.0</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>4,131.85</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,120.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78, 242.25</b>	<b>9,782.7</b>	<b>36,094.9</b>

\*= Transition Quarter, when the US Fiscal year changed from June to September.

Source: Mark 2002b: 13, Zanotti 2015: 35.

Dore Gold highlighted three basic goals behind the desire to forge this sort of cooperation:

\*Defence industrial cooperation relates to Israel's basic interest in maintaining an independent military industrial capacity in both research and development as well as production. This, despite the small size of its own internal defence market and the political constraints that limit its export opportunities.

\* Defence-industrial cooperation is also an aid issue. The US, as Israel's main external supporter, has been providing it with three billion dollars in yearly security assistance and economic support. Hence defence-industrial cooperation also involves developing agreed rules for utilising American military aid in a manner that might be mutually beneficial for both countries' economies.

\* Defence-industrial cooperation is also a technology transfer issue for Israel in its relationships with the United States. Interestingly, in the 1980s and early 1990s the American goal of preserving Israel's qualitative edge has been executed more through Israeli innovation than through the transfer of superior American weapons systems. Access to American technology can be critical for Israeli industries hoping to develop surprises for Israel's adversaries in future wars (Gold 1992: 5).

The objectives identified by Gold were applicable when these two countries started to undertake joint-programme for platforms such as Merkava tank, Lavi aircraft and Arrow anti-tactical ballistic missiles (ATBM). Israel could use the General Electric-made J-79 to power the Kfir jet.

Merkava tank production, which began in the mid-1970s, could be considered as one of the best manifestations of defence industrial cooperation between the two countries. This tank was a fusion of Israeli skills and American technologies and was one of the first instances when the former directly used the US military aid in manufacturing an offensive weapons system. Israel incorporated American-origin technology into Merkava, apart from financial military assistance. While the design and conception were Israeli, the tank was powered by an American-made engine manufactured by Teledyne Continental Motors (JTA 1977b). In 1975, Tal persuaded US Deputy Secretary of Defence William Clements to "utilise \$107 million of its Foreign Military Sales [FMS] credits on the Merkava program, and not restrict FMS funds to American equipment alone. Clements even allowed Israel to use \$59 million



of the amount allocated for the domestically-built tank within Israel itself' (Gold 1992: 9).

According to the original plan, in 1966, Israel and Britain discussed a co-production and the purchase of components for the Chieftain tank (Steinberg 1986: 175). Early batches of the tank were supposed to arrive in Israel in 1970 but due to the mounting pressure from the Arab states over such weapons sale, Britain unilaterally cancelled the agreement in 1969. This was a major blow to Israel's endeavours to develop its own tank and left a critical qualitative deficiency. At this juncture, the US had agreed to supply it with its obsolete M-48 tanks (Steinberg 1986: 175) and not the latest model M-60 tank (Reiser 1989: 100). These events led to the development of this main battle tank, also known as the Chariot, under the leadership of Tal (Mintz 1984: 118).

The 1979 Camp David Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt ushered in a new level of cooperation when the US increased its military aid to both the countries. As indicated in table 5-2, the military grant witnessed a quantum jump and touched US\$1.3 billion in this year. As described by Jeremy M. Sharp,

The 1979 Camp David Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt ushered in the current era of U.S. financial support for peace between Israel and her Arab neighbours. To facilitate a full and formal cessation of hostilities and Israel's return of the Sinai Peninsula, the United States provided a total of \$7.5 billion to both parties in 1979 (Sharp 2010: 22).

Since then, the military aid became stable and saw an enhancement from mid-1980s.

The burgeoning of military ties occurred at a time when Israel's arms exports began to witness an upward swing. The latter wanted to compensate for the loss of lucrative Sub-Saharan defence markets after these countries snapped diplomatic relations in the wake of the October War and the Oil Crisis. To fill the vacuum, Israel wanted to explore new markets and arms sales were transformed from a peripheral or secondary position to one of greater centrality of foreign policy after the October War (Klieman 1985: 23). For example, in 1975, its arms exports amounted to US\$50 million, but reached US\$250 to US\$300 million in 1979 (Klieman 1985:23). Furthermore, various defence industries started to expand their R&D, and larger platforms such as aircraft engines, warships, armoured fighting vehicles, missiles, aircrafts, electronic warfare

systems and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) began to be manufactured (Steinberg 1986: 162-182, Reiser 1989: 99-204). By giving utmost importance to domestic production, Israel wanted to reduce dependency and vulnerability in times of crisis.

Apart from Merkava, the joint-projects of Lavi fighter jet and anti-tactical ballistic missile (ATBM), or Arrow, were two other important programmes undertaken during the 1980s. For both these endeavours, the US made significant investments—financially and technology—in Israel. The Arrow project was part of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) programme announced by President Ronald Reagan in 1983. Israel signed a MoU with the US in May 1986 and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) wanted such a sophisticated anti-missile system to face the incoming threats of surface missiles from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria. In the words of Duncan L. Clarke, “The Arrow was an important symbol of a US-Israeli strategic relationship that had been expanded sharply after 1983; Israel stood to gain from improved access to US defence technology; and critically, it appeared probable that Washington eventually would pay most of the research and development costs” (Clarke 1994: 476-477). The agreement for joint-development was formalised in June 1988, and amount of US\$158 million was awarded for the contract, which was to be managed by the US Army Strategic Defence Command (later renamed the US Army Space and Strategic Defence Command-SSDC in 1993).

The US involvement in the project increased during the 1990s. Owing to the financial assistance provided by the US, there were oppositions from the US Army and the Department of Defence (DoD). Moreover, the requirement for such systems in the US began to be debated and the issue of technology transfer ensued. A Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed in May 1991 stipulated that “All Arrow-generated technologies remain under US control and that new technologies developed for Arrow not be transferred to third parties or applied to other Israeli projects without US approval” (Clarke 1994: 485). However, the restraint showed by Israel during the Iraqi scud missile attacks during the Kuwait Crisis led to the phase II development programme of Arrow. After failures in some of the test-firings, the US began to provide technical assistance. In April 1996, President Bill Clinton announced that the US would provide an additional US\$200 million for the deployment of Arrow and funding estimated at US\$50 million for the development project of a laser anti-missile

weapon system (Mark 2003b: 7). Two years later, another additional aid worth US\$45 million was announced by the Secretary of Defence William Cohen for the deployment of a third battery of Arrow. **Table 5-3** indicates the US financial aid to Israel for the Arrow missile development programme.

**Table 5-3: US Financial Contributions to the Arrow Anti-Missile Programme between 1990 and 2000 (in US\$ millions)**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Total Amount</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>52.000</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>42.000</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>54.400</b>
<b>1993</b>	<b>57.776</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>56.424</b>
<b>1995</b>	<b>47.400</b>
<b>1996</b>	<b>59.352</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>35.000</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>98.874</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>46.824</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>81.650</b>

**Source:** Sharp 2015: 12

The basic components of Arrow provided by the US included engine components, guidance systems, internal navigation system, electrical optical sensor, focal plane arrays, graphite, composite fibre and other relevant parts (Clarke 1994: 483). With such technological transfer, the US had reservations over Israel's possible exports of this missile system to a third party. Israel was accused of transferring Arrow-related technologies to China (addressed in Chapter Six). As of late 2000, US provided approximately 65 percent of the US\$1.1 billion cost of the programme (Hoyt 2007: 99). The system became operational from that year.

The Lavi programme was an important project over which Israel and the US agreed to cooperate in the 1980s and involved a substantial US military aid as well as

technology. Unlike the success of the Arrow, it was aborted on the ground of technological, financial and competition issues. The project became a symbol of extreme dependency of Israel on the US, its influence not only on Israel's arms exports but also on the R&D activities.

During the initial stage, Defence Minister Moshe Arens described this as a "fresh dimension in Israel-US relations because it is the first time the US participated in the development of such technology outside its own borders" (Ryan 1987: 18). Israel's endeavours to develop such an advanced jet began during mid-1970s. Dov S. Zakheim, an American government official who was closely associated with this programme appropriately said, "It may be that the Lavi episode was unique in the annals of American-Israeli relations and never to be repeated under any circumstance" (Zakheim 1996: XV).

While the exact nature of cooperation on Lavi has already been examined by a few scholars (Reiser 1989; Steinberg 1987b; Steinberg 1988; Zakheim 1996 and Clarke and Cohen 1986), this section focuses only on the influence of the US in the project.

As observed by one:

Since Israel has become a coproducer of several weapons systems with the United States and a recipient of US technology and scientific data, the United States will again have the opportunity, if not the political desire and will, to exert veto power on Israeli sales in the future. These decisions will depend on many factors, including US-Israeli relations at a given instance, and function of arms transfers within the wider realm of US foreign policy, and the competitiveness of the particular Israeli product with similar systems produced by the U.S weapons-exporting companies (Reiser 1989: 219).

Arms embargoes imposed against Israel mainly targeted its aircraft industry and its procurement of jets from external sources. This had led to the need to design and develop a multi-role fighter jet.

Scholars like Duncan L. Clarke and Alan S. Cohen studied the early phase of the Lavi programme, and considered it a "manifestation of the deep and broad commitment" of the US towards Israel's security and economic well-being (Clarke and Cohen 1986: 16). For them, this programme marked a change in the nature of US military aid to Israel, but affected security and economic relations between the two countries in the later stages of the cooperation. As much as Israel wanted the Lavi project to be an

indigenous one, it had become more dependent on US support. Its lack of technology and infrastructural necessity compelled it to reach out to the US for related assistance.

Lavi project, since its beginning, was caught by problems even within the Israeli establishment. There was a lack of consultation and coordination when this idea emerged, and the project was considered as more of IAI's project and its decision for such a large-scale project without any substantial consultation with the Israeli cabinet became problematic. The IDF, including the air force, did not favour this project as many were of the view that Lavi would be costlier than the US-made F-16. Defence firms such as Rafael and Tadiran were not very supportive of this project as they felt their funding could be curbed. This initiative was expected to be a costly affair and time consuming. The project carried a high potential of jeopardising available resources for other defence needs and could further aggravate economic crisis in the country. In 1981, in a report submitted by the state comptroller, IAI's plan to start the project without any prior approval was criticised (Reiser 1989: 171).

Israel had to rely on the US for some of the components and engine, in particular. In 1979, Defence Minister Ezer Weizman met with his US counterpart Harold Brown and put the development cost of Lavi at approximately US\$700 million (Ibid: 174). In the following year, Weizman decided on the General Electric F404 engines. Originally, Israel wanted to use Pratt and Whitney F100 engines, which also powered both F-15 and F-16. As Israel wanted to export this jet, incorporation of such foreign components would be subject to the approval of the US government. The US exhibited its reservations and laid out the following conditions:

- \*Sensitive engine components would have to be produced in the United States

- \*No release of any American foreign military sales (FMS) credits for purchases of Israeli goods or services for the aircraft

- \*No release of any FMS credits for any portion of the aircraft that might then be re-exported by the Israelis to third countries (Zakheim 1996: 5).

These highlighted US reservation over its technology transfer, its economic leverage, and the competitive nature of the Lavi.

When Weizman resigned in May 1980, Israel recommended Pratt and Whitney 1120 engines. Thereafter, Prime Minister Menachem Begin authorised the production of 300 Lavi aircrafts, and this was followed by the agreement with Pratt and Whitney to invest in Bet Shemesh plant so that most of the engines could be produced within the country (Reiser 1989: 176). Other export components Israel sought from the US were for the wing and vertical tail produced by the Grumman Corporation. American companies such as ITT, Bendix, and Goodyear assisted in the project (Klieman 1984: 46). Israel's reliance on the US for technical data package, apart from the economic aid, gave the latter a strong leverage over the entire programme.

Meanwhile, sensing a potential competition from IAI, the American company Northrop Corporation, during early 1980s, lobbied against the US military aid for Lavi. The American firms were of the view that their own production activity could be affected if the US diverted funds to Lavi, and this platform could give a competition to their own jets. The Lavi programme was accelerated when Arens became the defence minister in 1983.

The rising cost for the development became an important reason for the eventual rift between Israel and the US. Israel managed to bag an aid worth US\$ 550 million from the US Congress in 1983 for R&D, wherein US\$ 300 million would be used in the US and the rest in Israel (Clarke and Cohen 1986: 29). This happened after the US lifted partial embargo against Israel in the wake of 1982 Lebanon war.

By 1983, the originally estimated research and development costs for the aircraft had doubled (to \$1.5 billion) and estimated unit cost had arisen 50 percent. The General Accounting Office set the actual cost per Lavi at \$15.5 million, compared with \$12 million for an F-16A (in FY 1982 dollars). By 1985, research and development costs had risen to more than \$2 billion, the unit cost for each Lavi exceeded \$20 million, and the total research, development and production cost estimate for the entire program rose from \$6.5 billion in 1983 to over \$9 billion (Clarke and Cohen 1986: 23).

A major boost was given to the programme when, in 1984, the Reagan administration announced that Israel could use US\$250 million in Foreign Military Sales (FMS) funds for its Lavi R&D in the country, and not just for production.

By the end of 1983, the total US economic involvement stood at approximately US\$710 million spanning over 99 contracts with 70 US firms (Bahbah and Butler

1986: 52). In a quick succession, US Congress approved another US\$400 million in the fiscal year (FY) 1985 and US\$800 for FY 1986-1987, of which “up to \$150 million to be spent in the United States in each of these two fiscal years and not less than \$250 million per fiscal year for expenditure in Israel. This brought total United States support for the Lavi through FY 1987 to \$1.75 billion” (Clarke and Cohen 1986: 30). By bearing 90 percent of the entire programmes, the US emerged as the major funder. When the first prototype of Lavi flew on 30 March 1987, over US\$ 1.2 billion in US FMS funds had already been spent (Golan 2016; Hoyt 2007: 98). Such incremental aid became a major concern in the US as the cost outran the initial projections.

From 1986, Israel and the US got embroiled in a row due to the rising cost of the Lavi project. Pentagon urged Israel to scrap the programme on economic grounds, and suggested to use the fund on other weapons. The US Officials including Dov. S. Zakheim suggested alternatives and after thorough investigation of the estimated costs, he declared that “flyaway unit costs totalled \$ 22.1 million, which was 52 percent higher than Israel’s estimate of \$ 14.5 million” (General Accounting Office 1987b). With additional services and other costs of the entire program, he concluded that 300 Lavi jets would cost Israel about US\$20.6 billion, rather than the US\$14.7 billion as estimated by the Israeli defence ministry (Friedman 1986b). There were fluctuations in the estimations and a General Accounting Office (GAO) report put the figure at US\$17.4 million for a unit flyaway cost.

Due to this rising cost, the US offered its F-16 as a viable alternative with favourable conditions that “Israel could either acquire some more planes directly from the United States, or jointly develop a new Israeli version of the aircraft” (Zakheim 1996: 246). Similarly, this was the case when Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger presented his testimony before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on the superiority of F-15 and F-16 over the Lavi project, and how Israel promoted its own products to compete with US-made planes (Klieman 1984: 46, Steinberg 1988: 10). The Reagan administration expressed that the money saved could be used on other high-technology products (Friedman 1987a).

Amid the call of the US for scrapping the project, the IDF also intensified its opposition to the programme, due to severe budget constraints during 1985 and 1986. Several others programmes in Israel were likely to be affected due to such concentration on a single platform. This rift within Israeli establishments came in conjunction with the move of the US to prevent the project. Along with several Israeli political leaders, Michael Bruno, the Governor of the Bank of Israel argued that “there was no economic justification for the programme” and Israel had to terminate it (Zakheim 1996: 244).

Leaders from both the countries went into intense negotiations and the IAI asked for US\$ 1.4 billion as termination liabilities (Ibid.). While the US continuously emphasised on the availability of better US-made fighters, Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin requested for US\$ 300 as offshore procurement funding for same liabilities. By urging the termination of the programme, the State Department agreed to raise FMS to US\$400 million so as to pay for the cancellation cost (Clyde 2002a: 9, Zakheim 1996: 251). Finally, under intense pressure from the US, the Israeli Cabinet, on 30 August 1987, by a vote of 12 to 11, adopted a plan by Foreign Minister Peres to scrap the seven-year-old Lavi programme (Friedman 1987a). With this, Israel’s dream of producing 300 Lavi planes by the 1990s came to an abrupt end.

Contrary to its main objective of self-sufficiency, Israel ended up depending extraordinarily on US military and economic aid, technology and related expertise. In the 1980s, it became the largest recipient of US foreign military assistance where it spent US\$1.5 billion annually on direct commercial contracts and US\$300 million and the rest of US\$1.8 billion on FMS (General Accounting Office 1993a). As much as the project was considered a national project, it also symbolised the outright veto power of the US on Israel’s R&D programmes and related export plans.

As Israel achieved a certain degree of advancement in defence indigenisation, its ability to produce highly advanced combat aircrafts did not appear to be favourable to the US. Its emergence as a potential competitor became a concern for the US. As Israel enjoyed robust arms sales to Third World markets for decades, Lavi could also make inroads into those markets. This would come at a time when the US was also promoting its fighter jets and other weapons systems. Moreover, Israel might reduce



its aircraft imports from the US if it could produce in the country itself. This could be one reason why the US reiterated F-16 jets as a viable alternative to Lavi, and managed to sell 75 such aircrafts to Israel after the termination.

A 1989 General Accounting Office report of Lavi mentioned:

Between 1982 and 1987, Israel spent \$1.4 billion in FMS funds to develop the Lavi aircraft... Israel spent \$430.5 million FMS funds to cancel contracts (\$262.7 million) and to continue development and testing of selective avionics systems (\$167.8 million) after the program's termination, according to information provided by the MOD. Of the total, \$218.4 million was paid to companies in the United States and \$212.1 million was paid to companies in Israel... At that time [of termination], Israel had 136 open contracts and 1,500 active purchase orders with US companies... Nearly 70 percent of the FMS funds paid US companies (\$152.2 million went to one contractor-Pratt and Whitney... MOD paid \$147.4 million in contract termination costs to IAI and \$3 million to Bet Shemesh. In turn, IAI paid \$3.5 million to six subcontractors (General Accounting Office 1989b).

The Lavi episode marked an important crisis in the Israel-US relations borne out of their extreme interdependence without careful planning. Israel was more dependent as it initiated a project driven mainly by local interests and lobbies without any professional analysis of cost, benefits and alternatives (Steinberg 1988: 10).

Owing to the large-scale financial and technological assistance, the US had reached a stage where it could influence and even dictate Israel's arms exports and hence played ambivalent roles—advocacy and obstacle. Such intervention became a serious impediment in some of the latter's military ties with its clients and in the words of Aharon Klieman,

Yet the more ambitious and sophisticated its defence sales have become the less freedom of manoeuvre and liberty of action does Israel possess on the key operational choices of what items to sell and to which clients. By having to secure prior consent from a second party, the United States, for the sale or transfer of weapons systems containing American components, Israel increasingly must contend with a special kind of restraint not found, certainly not to such an extent, in the weapons transfers policies of the other prominent suppliers (Klieman 1985: 167).

The interferences made by the US were primarily due to the shift in its strategic interests between, during, and after the Cold War.

## Veto Power

The US had gained significant influence due to its uninterrupted military assistance to Israel since the end of 1960s. It reached a stage where it could block its ally from selling certain types of weapons systems if the recipient was considered a threat to the American strategic interests. This is where their foreign policy objectives clashed. There were cases where the US veto power brought an end to Israel's military exports, and in other it promoted arms sales and other military assistance. As aptly mentioned by Klieman,

In analyzing the impact of the United States on Israel's program of foreign military assistance and arms sales, one observation needs to be made at the outset. Whether in fact the U.S. government approves or disapproves of Israeli arms export diplomacy will depend on two things: (a) the general state of relations between Jerusalem and Washington; (b) respective weapons transfer policies of the two countries, which can either parallel each other or sharply diverge (Klieman 1985: 167).

The veto power was used against Israel depending on the US national and strategic interests and this section discusses some of the cases where Israel's attempts to export arms were vetoed due to commercial, technological and strategic issues.

In order to serve its interests, the US adopted different foreign policy preferences. This was widely prevalent between 1970s and the 1990s, when it encouraged and curtailed Israel's arms sales (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 166-170, Klieman 1985: 167-188). A tacit encouragement was given to prevent the penetration of the Soviet influence and during the late 1970s, the US supported Israel's military relations with a few Latin American countries, although in a few instances it blocked the sale of Kfir jet on the ground of US-origin parts.

This "Americanisation" of Israel's aircraft industry led to a flow of American assistance to Israel and gave a significant leverage to the US when the latter sought arms exports (Lockwood 1971/72: 80). Kfir's development occurred at a time when Israeli arms sales gained visibility, and under intense pressure from IAI, the Rabin government approved marketing of the jet abroad in 1976. This was followed by a strong American objection and the veto because of the US-made engine that powered the aircraft (Reiser 1989: 243). Israel sought to export this item when the Carter

administration was trying to curb the flow of arms to Latin America. The US interests thus clashed with the export activities of Israel.

Likewise, Israel's attempt to sell 24 such jets to Ecuador in 1977 was vetoed by the Carter administration because it "would run counter to US policy against the transfer of sophisticated weapons to Latin America" (JTA 1977a). Rabin unsuccessfully asked to reverse US opposition, which otherwise could have given IAI business worth US\$150-300 million (JTA 1977e). The US gradually began to exercise its leverage over sales of those defence items which were either produced in the US or were manufactured under license in Israel (Steinberg 1983: 301).

Scholars like Alex Mintz and Gerald Steinberg were of the view that "the extent of Israel's dependence on arms imports and the fact that Israel has typically relied only on a single supplier have led to political vulnerability reflected in the sudden cessation of the supply of arms and the attempts to impose political conditions on Israel" (Mintz and Steinberg 1989: 150). The US remained concerned over the possible exposure of sensitive American technologies to the Soviet Bloc countries (Gold 1992: 49). Due to this, US President Jimmy Carter wanted to reduce conventional arms transfers to Latin America and proliferation of military equipments in a country like Ecuador. As a result, he remained cautious even while cooperating with Israel's defence industries on weapons development programmes. Carter's policy of limiting arms flow to the region put both at odds, particularly towards the late 1970s when Israel's exports increased (Klieman 1985: 173).

An analysis of the political and strategic reasons behind the American veto of Kfir sale to Ecuador, bring to fore the probability of a potential Israeli competition against the US defence manufacturing sector. Further, economic incentives of such exports could not be ignored. The objection was voiced at a time when Israel's arms exports values were rising, and it was focusing more on local productions (Klieman 1985: 23-26, Lockwood 1971/72).

That Israel could develop an advanced system like Kfir after the French embargo caught the attention of the US. Owing to this development, the US seemed to be trying to prevent an emerging competition from its own ally. This was clubbed with growing concerns that Israel had gradually begun to achieve self-sufficiency in its

weapons production programmes with the help of the US military aid and technology. With the passage of time, the US started to consider Israel as a potential competitor and began to closely examine various types of aid such as transfers, coproduction, and licensing (Klieman 1985: 182). As a result, arms exports to Third World countries, which had ambitions to develop strong defence capabilities and regional ambitions, were closely monitored by the US, and had often resulted into veto (Klieman 1985: 82, Klieman 1984: 45).

Reflecting on US concern over Israel's speedy defence indigenisation programmes, Inbar observed:

The Americans were reluctant to help Israel in further expanding its burgeoning defence industry. Supply of sophisticated knowhow and machinery was restricted. For example, President Ford denied requests by Israel to obtain subcontracts for the F-16. President Carter refused to grant permission to sell the Kfirs to Ecuador, and it is believed that the Americans played a role in the Austrian decision not to purchase the Israeli kfirs. Washington refused to allow any co-production in developing airplanes. The American opposed co-production in other areas of military equipment... The US preferred not to aid the Israeli defence industry in order not to lessen its dependency upon American weapons (Inbar 2008: 34-35).

It is understood that the veto wielded by the US was not only out of the concerns over technology but also due to the potential challenge Israeli defence manufacturers would give to American firms.

It is also imperative to understand the ambivalent policy adopted by the US. While Israel continued to maintain a uniformed arms sales policy, the US adopted varying policies depending on the recipient. In some cases, it facilitated Israel's military relations with different countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, or vetoed. The debate over US shipments of arms to Israel and military aid became an important issue during 1976 presidential campaign (JTA 1976a). From the early days of Carter's presidency, the US State Department made efforts to withhold military supplies to Israel and even notified the latter that they would not be included on the top priority list of American arms recipients (JTA 1977c). The initial failure to obtain an interim Sinai agreement in 1975 became an important issue which made the US think over its policies towards Israel. This was in contrast to President Gerald Ford's administration which supported military assistance to Israel.

When President Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, Israel submitted its application for the permission to sell Kfirs to Ecuador again (JTA 1980a). This coincided with the new US administration's reorientation of its foreign policies and hence, the US lifted its ban on arms sales to Latin American countries. Finally, in March 1981, the US State Department announced its approval for Kfir transactions (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 118).

The Carter administration hence did not veto Israel's sale of 26 Mirage-V Dassault war planes to Argentina in 1978. The US administration did not consider this as destabilising the regional stability, and the jet did not have any US-origin component. The US ban on the sale of arms to this Latin American country proved to be lucrative for Israel. By 1981, Israel alone accounted for 14-17 percent of Argentina's total arms imports (Bahbah 1986: 86). However, the US, at the behest of Britain, unsuccessfully tried to prevent Israel from selling A-4 Skyhawks to Argentina during the Falklands-Malvinas crisis. The sale of Super-Mystere fighter had become problematic to the US as Israel failed to take prior permission because the jet had American-made Pratt and Whitney engines. The issue over unauthorised military transfers to a third country ensued, but this did not lead to a major scuffle between Israel and the US.

Carter, just before the 1980 US presidential elections, announced that he would not object to Israel promoting to Mexico its Kfir C-5, a lower performance version of C-2 fighter planes, but should seek permission for exports (JTA 1980a). The shift in the policies vis-à-vis the sale is explained by the State Department spokesman John Trattner:

...In the case of Mexico, however, it is a fact no US companies are interested in offering a sale to Mexico. Therefore, that is an element in the decision to allow Israel Aircraft Industries to make a presentation. This is a sales presentation. It does not amount to a sale... (JTA 1980 d).

The statement had come in contradiction to Kfir's sale to Ecuador where the US not only restricted the sale on the basis of retransferring American-origin technologies but also due to its commercial interests in that country. Hence, Trattner talked about interests of American aircraft industries that might have wanted to make similar sales. The Carter administration also considered selling the same jets to Colombia and Venezuela as well but these two countries had turned to other sources. Due to these

restrictions Israel lost important customers. More importantly, the fact that Israel had to seek export permission from the US was rebuked by customers.

The American disapproval of Israel's alleged re-transfers of weapons systems containing US-made technologies severely affected the latter's ties with China. Following the Sino-Israeli normalisation in January 1992, the US began to closely scrutinise Israel's arm exports. Arms diplomacy lost its significance when the issue of Patriot controversy erupted a few months after their diplomatic breakthrough (Kumaraswamy 1996a, Shichor 2005, 2000). This was followed by accusations over Israel's re-transfers of technologies related with Arrow anti-missile systems and the aborted Lavi fighter jet (Clarke 1994, Clarke 1995). Apart from these issues, the Phalcon controversy brought an end to the Sino-Israeli arms trade and significantly hampered their overall bilateral ties (Kumaraswamy 2005a). The threat over cancelling the US military aid, which touched US\$3.1 billion in 2000, made Israel succumb to the pressure. A similar third-party intervention was prominent in the Israeli-South African military ties although the interference was mainly triggered by the changing dynamics of the US foreign policy towards *apartheid*. Even in this case, the issues over upgrading and re-export of US-origin military technologies surfaced but not as prominently as with China. Chapter Six discusses the role of the US in promoting as well as curtailing Israel's arms exports to both these countries in detail.

The US factor did not always curtail Israel's arms exports but at times promoted the latter's military assistance. This was mostly seen in those countries with which the US did not want to openly identify with but was still supplying (Klieman 1985: 168-170). Military relations between Israel and a few Central American countries such as Nicaragua (under the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle) El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, and Honduras had the tacit backing of the US (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 141-171). In order to serve its strategic objective against the Communist-backed regimes, the US did not restrain Israeli exports in this area. For Israel, providing military assistance and selling arms to these countries were primarily commercial, "although political and ideological rationales seem to have both reinforced and complicated this motive during the 1980s" (Reiser 1989: 210).

It all began with the ban on arms sales imposed by Carter in 1977. Such restrictions facilitated the entry of Israel as one of the major arms suppliers to Central America. The absence of a reliable arms supplier had made them more lucrative in terms of arms sales and politically useful for the US (Howard 1983a: 229). The increasing involvement of the Soviet Union in countries like Nicaragua attributed to the US pressure to provide arms and military trainings. Despite the strong military cooperation that existed between Israel and Guatemala, the inability of the former to deliver Kfir jets in 1979, nevertheless, signified the veto power of the US. Although the US involvement in Guatemala was not that significant, the Reagan administration brought a change though it continued to deny supplying military aid as late as in 1985 (Hunter 1987a: 115). The new US administration began to cultivate interests in Guatemala and this was the time when Defence Minister Ariel Sharon thought Israel country could enhance its leverage by agreeing to perform certain duties for on behalf of the US in the Third World countries (Rubenberg 1986a: 21). The rising Soviet-backed activities in Nicaragua and El Salvador were attributed to the Reagan administration's desire to move closer to Guatemala (LeMoyne 1988, Onis 1981).

The above developments had resulted in the signing of a strategic MoU between Israel and the US in November 1981 (Israel-United States: Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation 1981). The MoU stated the need for a cooperation to deter all threats from the Soviet Union in West Asia and mentioned that the "US would grant third countries permission to spend part of their US military credits in Israel" (Rubenberg 1986a: 21). Unfortunately, the agreement was suspended when Golan Heights was annexed in late 1981, but was reinstated in November 1983 as US officials "believed that close cooperation with Israel was the only way to influence Israel's behaviour" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2008). This marked the beginning of a strategic cooperation between these two countries in the Third World countries, and had given rise to their coordinated involvement in South America (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 143-170, Reiser 1989: 211-213, Klieman 1985: 167-188).

In Honduras, too, Israel assisted the US-sponsored operation against the Sandinista government in neighbouring Nicaragua (Howard 1983: 230). The US did not create problems for arms sales to this country, including the Kfir jets, as it refrained from selling F-15 jets. In 1983, at the behest of the US, Honduras was supplied with

weapons captured from the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), including artillery pieces, mortar rounds, mines, hand grenades and ammunition. These arms were reportedly meant for “eventual use by Nicaraguan rebels” (Taubman 1983). In the words of the US State Department official:

They are part of an enlarged Israeli role in Central America that was encouraged by the United States as a way of supplementing American military aid to friendly governments and supporting insurgent operations against the Nicaraguan Government (Taubman 1983).

The strategic interests of the US led to the encouragement given to Israel in its military assistance programme.

Costa Rica was another country where Israel provided military assistance as the Reagan administration could not do so due to the Congressional restrictions but decided to use this strategic location as a base to promote its anti-communist activities by roping in Israel. A report by *The New York Times* stated that Israel offered Costa Rica a substantial amount of military equipment captured from the PLO in Lebanon, on the condition that the transportation costs should be met by the latter (Gelb 1982).

Israel...is there, as in South America, Africa and elsewhere, for its own reasons: to build markets essential to the economic strength of its large military industries and to cushion its diplomatic isolation caused by Arab diplomacy. An added but not critical element in Central America is the opportunity to combat the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is supporting the Sandinist Government in Nicaragua and the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador (Gelb).

The convergence of interests with that of the US sustained the military ties.

Jane Hunter criticised Israel’s surrogate role at the behest of the US, and considered Luis Alberto Monge as one of the “strongest Zionists in Central America” (Hunter 1987a: 167). She condemned the role played by the US in bribing the Costa Rican officials so that they would remain indifferent to the contras in Nicaragua, and how Israel operated inside this tiny nation with the help of agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Hunter 1987a: 167). Through coordinated efforts, Israel and the US helped in setting up electronic detection system along the Nicaraguan borders (Bahbah and Butler 1986: 158). A greater degree of the US and Israel involvement was seen in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Israel’s military assistance to Costa Rica was tacitly supported to fight the rising influence of the Sandinista



government in Nicaragua. This was more prominent after the fall of the Somoza regime when the US had started to look for proxies to aid the rebels in their fight against the new Sandinista government.

Hunter criticised Israel's role in Nicaragua in the following words:

...But in the United States, where the Carter human rights doctrine had supposedly constituted a decisive step in the right direction, there were blank stares in the other direction. Somoza's henchmen are said to have killed one member of every family in Nicaragua. It seems fairly obvious in retrospect that many Nicaraguan lives might have been saved had peace and solidarity activists in this country made loud and persistent demands that Israeli arms shipments be stopped... (Hunter 1987a: 140).

Under intense pressures from the US, Israel terminated its arms sales to the Somoza regime in 1979. Shortly thereafter, the contras increased their resistance in Nicaragua. Around this time, the Reagan administration revoked the curb on arms sales to Central America, they and wanted to contain the rising anti-American forces in Nicaragua, and place a reliable partner to aid the contras. Israel was also cautious of the gradual rapprochement between the PLO and Sandinistas. Beginning from the early 1980s, Israel, with a backing from the Reagan administration, supplied the contras with weapons. As had been the case with Honduras, it was asked to supply the contras with the weapons captured from the PLO.

The issue over using a third country to act on its behalf generated a heated discussion in the US, and created a visible division between the administration and the Congress and the latter had begun to take steps to curtail aid to the contras as early as 1984. In 1985, the Reagan administration stated that if the Congress thwarted its efforts to fund the contras in Nicaragua with US\$14 million, the option of using a third country to carry its policies against the Sandinista government would not be ruled out (JPS 1985b: 192). The US administration preferred to opt for covert aid after the Congress halted such aid to the contras. Accordingly, the president discussed the feasibility of using either El Salvador or Honduras or Asian countries such as Taiwan or Thailand as its surrogates to aid the Nicaraguan rebels (Weinraub 1985). When these two Asian countries refused to get involved directly, the option of Israel surfaced. Reagan looked for a partner which could help the CIA's activities in Nicaragua and in 1984, a "contra leader suggested that Israel might help the contras as a favour to the Reagan

administration, and out of consideration for the \$2.6 billion in U.S. aid it received from the U.S. that year” (Hunter 1987a: 163). Israel “accused the Reagan administration of allowing the contras to publicise” military assistance “in order to improve their image with pro-Israel members of Congress” (Jamail and Gutierrez 1986: 29).

During the initial days of the covert activities, there were certain frictions as Israel and the US denied an existence on coordination in Central America. In early 1984, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yosef Amihoud ruled out any role in supplying arms to Nicaragua rebels and in the words of David Kimche, the Director General of the Israeli Defence Ministry:

...The policy of the state of Israel is to supply arms to constitutionally organized countries and not to unofficial organization. We have not had any contact with the contras. And to the best of our knowledge, no arms coming from Israel have found their way to the contras... (*The New York Times* 1984).

This was after anonymous officials from the Reagan administration publicly announced Israel’s continued arms supplies to the rebels at the behest of the US (Taubman 1983).

The US administrations between 1970s and 1980s carried out contradicting policies, and witnessed immense congressional pressures in limiting Israel’s as well US military aid to Central American countries. Klieman said, “Israel is so beholden to the United States that it becomes not only difficult but unpleasant to turn down such request” (Klieman 1985: 49).

Meanwhile, the news about an aid worth between US\$10million and US\$30 million received by the Nicaraguan contras created anguish in the US. The amount was “paid to the representatives of Israel funnelling the arms to Iran” (Weinraub 1986). This was the Iran-Contra affair where a connection between the US, Israel, Iran and Central America was revealed (Segev 1988). The Reagan administration allowed Israel to sell some of its advanced military systems to Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The US carried out these risky activities with a motive to establish relations with the moderate Iranians who were considered opponents to the hardliner Ayatollah Khomeini, who was a staunch anti-US leader. This scandal has remained one of the

most important events in the history of the US influence over Israel's military sales. According to the *Tower Commission Report*, the Reagan administration made clandestine deal with Defence Minister Rabin in 1985 for shipping arms captured by Israel from the PLO to the contras (*The Tower Commission Report* 1987). After the American hostages were released in 1981, Israel's involvement in supplying arms to Iran, at the behest of the US, intensified.

Israel wanted to supply arms to Iran since the early days of the Khomeini regime mainly considering the wellbeing of the small Jewish community in Iran; its aim being to show that it was a reliable arms supplier irrespective of the regimes; to expand foreign defence markets at a time of dwindling economy, and to revitalise its peripheral strategy that had started in the 1950s to break out of the encirclement of its Arab adversaries (Tessler 1989: 114-115). By dealing with Iran, it wanted to showcase its strategic utility to the US and to enhance its status in the eyes of the Reagan administration (Ibid: 122). The readiness to supply arms garnered political support from the US. Later on, despite the arms deals, Iran's verbal antagonism against Israel continued and their cooperation became an "open hostility" (Abadi 2004: 51-61). The entire episode highlighted how the US deployed Israel to act in those areas where it had limited manoeuvrability.

The effect of the US factor was also witnessed in South Asia. Sri Lanka was one such country where Israeli arms exports were promoted by the US. Israel's relations with this island nation were carried out both covertly and overtly (Abadi 2004: 286). It stepped up its efforts to supply military assistance to Sri Lanka, at the behest of the US, when Tamil rebels started to challenge Sinhalese domination during the late 1970s and a full-blown war broke out in 1983. When major powers such as the US and Britain refused the request of the Sri Lankan government for counterinsurgency measures, Israel was the only country willing to provide the service. As Israel sought political, economic and military back-up from the US, it complied with the latter's request and agreed to sell arms to Sri Lanka. Moreover, the talks of the PLO training Tamil guerrillas became a major concern (Stevens 1984). In return for Israel's help, Colombo allowed an interest section of the former to be located in the American embassy in 1984 (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 35). This eased Israel's activities within the

country, and they also had conducted military-intelligence cooperation (Kumaraswamy 1987: 1, 41-55).

The Sri Lankan government purchased naval patrol crafts, military vehicles, airplanes and small arms from the US, Israel, and others (Weisman 1985). This connection became one of Israel's most important involvements in the Third World induced by the US (Beit-Hallahmi 1987: 35). In 1995, Israel obtained permission from the US to sell its Kfir jets to this island nation (Abadi 2004: 304). By acquiring seven such jets in that year, and another eight by 2000, Sri Lanka became the first Asian client to fly Kfir (Eshel 2014).

Likewise, the US factor has not affected Indo-Israeli arms trade, and both these countries continue to conduct military cooperation without any American intervention (Kumaraswamy 1998b). The US did not even veto the export of Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to India when the same sale was prevented to China. The Sino-Israeli agreement for such arms transfer was achieved when the US began to alter its perception of China after the end of the Cold War. The end of the Israeli-South African military ties was also largely due to the US threat of cancelling annual military aid.

## Conclusion

Israel's dependence on the US for military assistance evoked latter's influence. As a result, its arms sales were regulated according to the interests of the US. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the containment policy drove the US to support Israel's arms exports and military assistance to several countries. From later part of the 1980s, the US policy began to alter due to the dwindling of the Cold War rivalry. As a result of this shift, it began to have problems with Israel's military ties with China and South Africa. Depending upon the policies of a particular US administration and the Congress, Israeli arms sales either got promoted or curtailed.

The US policy towards South Africa underwent a significant change from mid-1980s. Owing to rising home-grown and international condemnations against the *apartheid* regime, the US began to apply pressure on the Israeli-South African military ties and this was the time when the anti-*apartheid* legislation began to gain momentum in the US (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195). By then, military cooperation between Israel and

South Africa was at their peak. As Israel continued with its military cooperation, the US threatened to terminate annual military aid to countries supplying arms to the *apartheid* regime. Towards the end of the Cold War, the call for putting an end to missile proliferation programmes intensified. This applied to the Israeli case as it was pursuing robust cooperation in missile technology with South Africa. A similar US approach was adopted when it encouraged the establishment of Israel's military contacts with China during the late 1970s.

In both the cases, the US used its leverage to strengthen as well as to curtail the arms sales. The rising capabilities of China in terms of military and economy from the late 1980s and early 1990s was perceived as a potential threat to the US and its strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region (Shichor 2000, Kumaraswamy 2006a and 2006b). The transformation in foreign policy orientation after the collapse of the USSR became one of the reasons for the US stymieing the Sino-Israeli military ties after 1992. Apart from this politico-strategic factor, the issue of the alleged illegal re-transfers of US-origin military technologies severely damaged the Israeli-US relations (Clarke 1995; Clarke and Johnston 1999). As in the case of South Africa, the US used the threat of withholding an aid worth US\$250 million if Israel was to continue with its Phalcon sale to China (Sharp 2012: 17-18). As Israel did not want to lose aid, which was required for its defence R&D programmes, it complied with the US pressure and halted further arms sales to China.

Writing on the dual policies of the US, P.R. Kumaraswamy made the following observation:

The end of the Cold War radically altered the American view of the world, especially its understanding of China... The emergence of China as a major power was expected to hasten the weakening of the USSR and diminish its efforts to threaten American interests. Under this paradigm, the Sino-Israeli military cooperation was a welcome development. The strengthening of the Chinese military capabilities was only to serve the American containment policy vis-à-vis the USSR. Hence, during the Cold War years the US largely remained indifferent towards the Sino-Israeli military ties. One could even suggest that by not making it an issue in its bilateral relations with Israel, the US even encouraged the latter to pursue export of military goods and technology to Communist China. The Soviet Union was the prime American pre-occupation and Sino-Israeli military ties became a second line of American defence (Kumaraswamy 2013a: 150-151).

When the Cold War came to an end, the US attitude towards China changed and began to find reasons to stop Israel's military exports.

The eventual halting of arms exports to China and South Africa can be considered as the most important cases where the dual policies of the US played out successfully to suit its political and strategic objectives. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the nature of relations between the US and Israel at a given time, profile of Israel's arms recipients and the types of weapons to be sold would continue to remain important factors for future arms exports. With all these considerations, the US will likely remain as, what Klieman said, "Promoter, critic, co-partner, market, rival" of Israeli arms exports, and would use "veto" depending upon the situation (Klieman 1985: 167-188).

Against the background of this, the next chapter gives a comparative analysis of the US policies towards Israel's arms exports to China and South Africa. In this chapter, issues related to alleged retransfer of Lavi technology to South Africa, missile cooperation, controversies with China pertaining to Phalcon and Patriot are also highlighted.

## Chapter Six

### A Comparison

This chapter discusses the role of the United States (US) in Israel's arms export policies towards China and South Africa and examines how it changed the course of Israel's relations with both the countries to suit its strategic interests. This factor was more noticeable in Israel's arms sales to China than to South Africa. Israel had to cease selling arms to China due to intense pressure from the US and controversies related to Lavi fighter components, Patriot missile technologies and Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) as are highlighted in this chapter. There were no visible or similar controversies pertaining to any particular defence product sold to South Africa, but the US pressurised Israel to halt to its arms exports to the *apartheid* regime.

#### China

The US factor in Israel-China military relations is considered one of the most important dimensions of the bilateral relations but the US played an ambivalent and even contradictory role. During the 1970s, it directly or indirectly promoted or facilitated Israel's arms sales to China due to its strategic calculations, but started to entertain serious reservations on the same issue from the late 1980s. The changing policies of the US vis-à-vis China towards the end of the Cold War, and particularly after the demise of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had been a policy shift. Along with this, from the 1980s, the issue of Israel's illegal retransfers of US-origin military technologies irritated the US and this had resulted in its interference in Israel's arms exports. The impact of this third-party intervention was so serious that the military ties between Israel and China came to an abrupt end in 2000, after the Phalcon controversy. Military sales that had promoted the Sino-Israeli ties became a factor that plagued the bilateral ties after the establishment of diplomatic relations in January 1992.

An analysis of the US concern over the retransfer of American technology to China revealed some hidden implications and rationale. The issue was not confined to illegal

or unauthorised re-transfers of American technology to China but the US was perturbed by the implications of such dealings upon the strategic balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. The security implication on the Taiwan Straits was another concern for the US. Sinologist like Yitzhak Shichor questioned the American presence in the region and argued:

US military presence in East Asia since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union fuelled the tension in the region and artificially sustains friction between the PRC and ROC, since China fears-whether rightly or wrongly... The US military intervention or that this presence will encourage a unilateral ROC declaration of independence (Shichor 2000).

In his assessment, the main security problem in the Asian frontier was not the Israeli-Chinese military relations but the presence of “the rogue superpower (namely the USA) across the Pacific”(Ibid.).

It is often argued that China’s acquisition of arms from Israel could by no means destabilise the balance of power in East Asia. In a way, it helped improve any existing regional imbalance of power, particularly considering the overwhelming US military presence. If the military relations were seen as a threat, an interesting aspect to note is how the US had ignored Israel’s protests over the sales of AWACS to Saudi Arabia in 1981. Moreover, between 1987 and 1996, the US supplied offensive weapons worth over US\$40 million to countries like Egypt, Bahrain and Kuwait (Shichor 2000). While it continued with its sales of those defence items, Israel was forced to give up the Phalcon deal with China. The dependence on the US aid had given a greater leverage to the US influence on Israel’s foreign relations, and particularly regarding arms exports.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the normalisation of relations between Israel and China was largely facilitated by the arms trade that had begun during the late 1970s. Due to limited political and economic leverages, Israel exploited the opportunities presented by China and adopted military sales in furtherance of its foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis China. During this period, both the countries worked in tandem to overcome their deficiencies without making significant political concessions to one another. At least in public, both the countries sought to highlight mutual political differences while seeking closer military relations.



The growing military relations after normalisation in 1992 became a major source of concern for the US. One could witness growing third-party interference. The US which once supported Israel's arms supply to China before the collapse of the Soviet Russia started to perceive this dimension as a potential threat to its interest in the Asia-Pacific region. The Sino-American rapprochement that happened in 1971 was largely seen as an outcome of a "shared animosity and fears concerning the USSR" (Kumaraswamy 2013a: 150). For most of the 1970s and 1980s, China and the US shared common strategic objectives towards the Soviet Union, and it became a policy of the latter to transfer categories of military systems and defence items (both civilian and military applications) to China (Clarke and Johnston 1999:193).

Under such circumstances, Israel's arms exports were not seen as a threat by the US. As P.R. Kumaraswamy eloquently puts it,

Moreover prior to 1992, the United States was not unduly concerned about the military dimension of Israel's overtures towards China. During this period Israel was seen as China's backdoor to western technology, and the western media regularly reported Israeli military sales to China. The United States however remained indifferent (Kumaraswamy 2006b: 398).

The indifference of the US did not last for long, and it had started to exhibit displeasure over such ties.

The Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 and the consequent Western sanctions against China changed the scenario. After this incident, Israel continued exporting its military equipments to China despite the US-led sanction. As a result, from the late 1980s, there had been close monitoring of the Sino-Israeli military relations by the US, and in 1992, Israel was accused of transferring US-origin military technologies to China. The timing of the US disapproval was an interesting. By the end of the Cold War, the US no longer considered China a counterweight to the Soviet threat and began to have serious problems with Israel's arms exports.

Most of the controversies regarding Israel's arms supply to China stemmed from allegations pertaining to retransfer of military items that contained US technology or were funded by the US. For example, controversies over Phalcon AWACS, Lavi fighter aircraft and Patriot missile systems impacted bilateral ties. Another important factor is the implication for strategic balance in Asia-Pacific region due to Israel's

arms supply to China and how the US viewed this relationship. As the US had major interests in the Taiwan Straits, it felt that Israel's military supplies to China could destabilise the region.

Sino-Israeli relations did not follow a normal pattern as their newly established ties were marred by controversies. The military component that played a crucial role before normalisation was conspicuously absent after 1992. This was contrary to Israel's diplomatic establishment with countries such as Turkey and India where military ties have become one of the most important pillars of their bilateral relations. The importance of Israel's arms sales to China dwindled as such tactics could no longer further their ties post-normalisation, and in the words of Kumaraswamy,

Their desire for closer and mutually beneficial relations came into conflict with a growing American desire to impede such a relationship. As a result, while the Israeli overtures towards China were not only long, tedious and at times frustrating, the normalisation of relations as well failed to match up to the expectations (Kumaraswamy 2006b: 393).

The US factor was not new but was visible in the 1950s. This was the period when Israel was struggling to enhance its relations with this superpower by altering its policy of not siding with either blocs of the Cold War. Its neutrality ended with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 (Shichor 1994 and 1979).

It is known that the US influence on Israeli foreign policy prevented the latter from supporting China during the Korean War (Shichor 1994). Israel's siding with the US over Korea became one of the reasons which caused the delay in establishing diplomatic relations with China. As observed by Yossi Melman and Ruth Sinai, "This approach was a clear change from Israel's efforts during its first two years of statehood to adopt a neutral stand in the developing Cold War between the West and the East" (Melman and Sinai 1987: 398-399). The desire to move closer to the US for political, economic and military support made Israel to alter its policies. When it wanted to normalise relations with China during mid-1950s, the latter had already warmed up to Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and later with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The political changes in China during the later part of the 1970s created a favourable climate for the improvement of ties.

The ambivalent nature of the US policy was exposed when it began to pressurise on Israel to curb its arms sales to China in the 1990s. During the height of the Cold War, the US promoted such military sales by Israel relations with a few countries to contain the penetration of the Soviet influence, especially in Latin America. In many of the countries where the US did not want to get involved directly or openly out of certain restrictions from the Congress, it used Israel as its surrogate. Chapter Five has highlighted relations where Israel worked at the behest of the US. Even in those countries, there were instances when the US prevented Israel from selling military equipments. While the changing geo-politics and the issue of retransfers of US-origin military technologies were prominent factors, the issue of potential competition from Israeli arms industries to the American-made weapons systems in the Third World defence was also a pertinent factor. Along with the intervention of the US, the emergence of democratic rulers in a few Latin American countries made Israel arms exports less important. This is somewhat similar to the South African case where, along with US pressure, the end of *apartheid* rule made arms exports less meaningful.

Although both Israel and China conducted military ties before the establishment of diplomatic ties, the US gradually began to see China as a potential threat. As it became the largest aid giver to Israel, the latter did not have a choice and its helplessness due to the US pressure reduced its credibility as a potential arms exporter, not only to China but also to many other countries. As a result of growing Chinese military and economic power, scholars like Duncan Clarke and Robert Johnston argued, “whether real growth in China’s economy and defence budget is modest or substantial- and wholly apart from the ‘engagement Vs containment’ debate over US China policy, China posed potential security threats to the US interests” (Clarke and Johnston 1999:194). The alleged re-transfers of American missile technology to China was one of the crucial reasons behind the fallout of triangular relations involving Israel, China and the US.

The relationship between Israel and China placed a strain on US-Israeli relations too. The US was concerned that the advanced Israeli radar could assist in China’s espionage on Taiwan and this could threaten the sovereignty of the latter. It was because of such an interpretation of the military-security relations that the Phalcon deal had to be cancelled.

China and Israel denied the arms trade but by the early 1990 it became very difficult. In an interview with *Cable News Network* on 14 March 1992, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens admitted that it sold military technology to China. This was the first occasion a senior official confirmed military dealings with China (Abadi 2004: 88).

Ironically, despite Arens admitting the arms sale to China, many Israelis continued to deny the veracity of the report. During the mid-1990s, Director General of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) David Ivri admitted the supply of aircraft technology to China. The estimated value of sophisticated technology sold to China between 1992 and 1995 was more than US\$ 1.5 billion. At the same time, Sino-Israeli relations intensified during this period and cooperation between them continued despite the US disapprovals.

With the more powerful role of the US, the relations became a triangular affair. Its influence became apparent just weeks after normalisation in 1992. The US government expressed its concern over the transfer of even native Israeli and derivative US technology to China, a concern publicised with regard to the Patriot Air and Missile Defence system, the Lavi jet fighter, and Phalcon and Harpy (Shai 2009: 26). The following section discusses some of the major Sino-Israeli controversies that emerged out due to the US intervention.

#### *a. Patriot Controversy*

The Patriot controversy is the earliest known controversy which involved Israel's alleged transfer of US-origin military technology. The US-made Patriot missiles were deployed in Israel during the 1991 Kuwait crisis for protection against the incoming missile threats from Iraq. In March 1992, within days after the liberation of Kuwait, the Bush administration expressed its concern over Israel's alleged sharing of this technology with China (Sciolino 1992). This issue was flagged when Arens visited Washington to meet Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney. The latter expressed displeasure and said, "We have information from reliable intelligence sources that you are transferring technology and materials from the Patriot batteries supplied to Israel by the US for its defence to the Chinese" (Arens 2005). This statement came as a reminder that the US took serious note of unauthorised transfers of its technology to China which was considered as potentially hostile.

The US administration came up with such accusations after another report was published hinting at Israel's involvement in 'retransferring' American technology to a third country without prior permission. The Report of Audit, prepared by the Inspector General of the State Department Sherman M. Funk, in March 1992, was the first report in which the US government pointed at Israel for its improper re-exports of US-origin weapons technology (US Department of State 1992, Clarke 1995: 95). When this report, also known as Funk Report, was released, Israel was not named but identified as a "major recipient of US weapons and technology". There is a separate section in the report which mentioned about the violation of arms transfers:

We found that reports of significant alleged violations of the AECA [Arms Export Control Act] and ITAR [International Traffics in Arms Regulations] retransfer restrictions by a major recipient of US weapons and technology had not been properly acted upon by PM [Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs], which is responsible for initiating the reports of violations and ensuring compliance with US laws and regulations governing arms exports. The violations include sales of sensitive U.S items and technology to countries prohibited by US law from receiving such items. The violations cited and supported by reliable intelligence information show a systematic and growing pattern of unauthorised transfers by the recipient dating back to about 1983 (US Department of State 1992: 17).

Angered by this report, a few Israeli officials considered it as a move by some US officials to embarrass and harm the relations between the two countries (Haberman 1992b).

The US State Department summoned the Israeli ambassador Zalman Shoval and asked for an explanation. The envoy denied his country's involvement in the transfer of such sophisticated technology, but an official from the Bush administration said, "I believe the report is probably true and certainly substantive enough to require an investigation", and he characterised Israel's denial as "indirect and a bit suspicious" (Sciolino 1992).

It was during this controversy that Israel publicly acknowledged the sales of arms to China. Arens said, "Our industrial base is microscopic compared to the US industrial base, and so Israel has no choice but to export some defence item", and he also said there were "some exports to China" (Kempster and Williams 1992). Along with this statement, Arens vehemently denied the accusations of the US, and he said further

said that “Israel will continue to sell arms to any country it chooses, including China, because it needs the funds to keep its defence industry humming” (Kempster 1992). The centrality of arms sales in the running of the country’s defence industries was highlighted by the minister.

What made the controversy worth addressing was the way the US accused its ally of such unauthorised transfers of technology. The matter became serious, as it involved not only the sales of the finished defence products but also technology as well. The US could not produce any concrete evidence in support of its allegations but they damaged the newly established the Sino-Israeli diplomatic relationship. Since this incident had occurred towards the end of the Cold War, it had raised more concerns for the US. Regional arms race had developed at a great pace during the Cold War and China was known for its missile proliferation activities to countries like Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia (Gaffney Jr 1997). As China established increased diplomatic ties in the West Asian region, it also increased its military collaboration, particularly arms transfers. Forging of closer ties with anti-US states such as Libya, Iran and even Iraq became a serious concern for the US China’s intended sale of medium or long-range missiles to some of these countries worried the US (Pan 1997, Shichor 1999: 153-178). There was concern that China might have transferred some of the weapons systems procured from Israel to these potentially hostile states (Kennedy 1993: 6, Stohl and Grillot 2009).

The US officials were not very sure about the real intention behind Israel’s alleged transfer of Patriot missile technology to China. However, a senior official from the Bush administration speculated that “Israel might want to receive information on Chinese missiles in return. Another official suggested that Israel might be trying to solidify its long military relationship with China” (Sciolino 1992). This episode coincided with China’s development of ballistic missile systems—M-9 and M-11—and the US suspected that these missiles would have been reengineered with an understanding of the Patriot missile system (Ibid.).

Apart from the issue of illegal transfers of US-origin technology to China, it was believed that a political crisis between Israeli and the US governments had also contributed to this controversy. As Zeev Schiff said, “because of the crisis of

confidence existing between President [George H.W] Bush and Mr. [Yitzhak] Shamir and a few of his ministers, there is a tendency these days to believe almost anything that Israel is accused of” (Haberma 1992b). There was a general suggestion that the US would not give Israel the US\$10 billion in loan guarantees the latter had requested at that time meant for the absorption of immigrants from the erstwhile Soviet Union (Tyler 1992). The unsettled loan guarantee was seen as an important reason behind the US accusation. The US administration insisted that Israel cease settlement constructions before the loan was to be granted (Kempster and Williams 1992). The threat of withholding the loan exposed Israel’s vulnerability of depending on US military and economic assistance.

It has been argued that Israel also alienated the US military intelligence establishment (Kumaraswamy 1996a:18). For many reasons, sections of people in Israel and the US blamed President George Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker for diverting and diluting the policies adopted by the Reagan administration (1981-1989). Bush was accused of lacking the traditional and emotional commitment and of challenging Israel and its US supporters. When the allegations broke out, David Magen, Israel’s minister of economics and planning, denounced the administration’s “cruel and false accusations” as “hostile acts aimed at undermining Israel” (JTA 1992c).

The commercial motive of the US over accusing for transferring Patriot missile technology was not ruled out. In the words of one:

... Ulterior motive of anti-Israel campaign lies in the commercial sphere. Largely out of commercial considerations, influential section with the aviation industry opposed America’s technological and financial support for the Lavi. Thus Israel perceived the Patriot accusations as an American move to scuttle any potential competition in the international arms trade. Raytheon, the manufacture of the Patriot, would also benefit from the controversy (Kumaraswamy 1996a: 19).

In the past, potential competition against the US-made arms in some of the Third World defence markets resulted in the US vetoing certain arms exports (Klieman 1985: 85-86). The example of the Lavi is a suitable case, as it has been witnessed that the project for this aircraft was terminated not only on the ground of huge economic cost but also because of a looming competition.

The severity of the Patriot controversy reached its peak when the Bush administration decided to send a team of inspectors to Israel to investigate. This was the first time when such steps had been taken by the US over arms exports. In late March 1992, the US sent a 15-member inspection team to verify the veracity of the allegations. This move showed the US distrust over Israel's arms supply to China. Israeli officials considered the allegations as baseless and said, "We have nothing to hide here...The visiting Americans, who are investigating only the allegations involving Patriot missiles, will be able to visit any place they wish ...they will have full cooperation to look for whatever they want" (Haberman 1992a). Despite Israel's refusal to the allegation, relationships with the US reached the lowest point.

The US officials who accused Israel of the technology retransfers were confident of finding the smoking gun to support their claims. One official even mentioned, "When we talk in our report about technology, we are talking about hardware. We are not talking about something abstract; we mean something physical that can be looked at" (Kumaraswamy 1996a: 20). On 2 April, the US State Department and not the Pentagon announced that its investigators failed to find any evidence regarding the allegations. The US officials who were part of the team mentioned their acceptance of Israel's assurances that "it would comply in the future with restrictions on the re-export of United States-designed weaponry, but they also said the State Department was partly to blame for disarray in enforcing arms-export laws" (Tyler 1992).

A problematic aspect of this controversy was the inability of the concerned US authorities to produce any concrete evidence supporting the allegations. Due to this, some Israeli leaders even demanded a formal apology from the US administration for implicating against the country with such unsubstantiated allegations. Although short of an apology as anticipated by officials, Margaret D. Tutwiler, who was the US State Department spokeswoman, said, "The Israeli Government has a clean bill of health on the Patriot issue", and thanked Israel's defence ministry for its "superb cooperation" (Ibid.).

Israel, at the same time, raised its opposition to China regarding the latter's supply of non-conventional weapons to a few West Asian countries. There were reports of an agreement between Rabin and Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen over the export



of Chinese arms to the region but China denied such claims (Kumaraswamy 1996a:14). Thereafter, the West Asian region had become the prime target of China, especially when their commercial motives were superseded by political considerations.

Israel's export partner in missile was none other than China. This made the US more concerned about their entire military-security cooperation, especially pertaining to transfer of missile technology. There were arguments that such a controversy cropped up due to an "outright decision to undermine Israel's credibility in the American security community" (Ibid: 17). Some scholars attributed the reasons for controversy to Israel's continued dependence on Washington. This issue not only undermined the Sino-Israeli relations but also largely affected its ties even when such accusations were dismissed by Israel as "false", "fabricated", "illogical" and "unsubstantiated"(Ibid:17). Though the allegations were not found to be true, the Patriot missile episode damaged the understanding between Israel and the US and exposed the differences that had brewed up between these two countries during the early 1990s.

The Patriot controversy did not put an end to the US suspicion on Israel's retransfers of American-origin military items. Since the release of the 1992 *Funk Report*, concerned authorities in the US kept close vigilance on Israeli arms exports not only to China but also to other countries as well. In 1993, there were serious allegations regarding transfer of sensitive items such as missile systems and fighter aircraft technologies again. In February, the US Senate released a report on the threats of missile proliferation during the 1990s and the high-tech and military cooperation that was going on between China and Iran was highlighted by this report. It was during this time, the Director of Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A), R. James Woolsey identified Israel as China's main source of defence technology. In his words,

We believe the Chinese seek from Israel advanced military technologies that US and Western firms are unwilling to provide:

Beijing probably hopes to tap Israeli expertise for cooperative development of military technologies—such as advanced tank power plants and airborne radar systems—that the Chinese would have difficulty producing on their own.

The Chinese probably also hope that formalizing such ties will foster an environment in which they can recoup some of the cost they have incurred in more than a decade of acquiring defence technologies from Israel—a cost that may be several billion dollars. For example, the Chinese sought to interest Tel Aviv in using their space launch services by taking Israeli President Herzog to a satellite control centre during his state visit in December 1992 (US Senate 1993: 158).

After the Patriot controversy, Israel was once again accused by the US for illegally transferring technologies related to airborne warning systems, fighter jet, and anti-missile systems.

#### *b. Phalcon Controversy*

The issue of regional stability being disturbed by Israeli arms exports to China became a major concern to the US since the mid-1990s. As the US began to view China as the threat, it started to have reservations over Israel's military exports. The US seemed to be obsessed with China's potential to undermine its interests. As a result, it had taken up these controversies in the name of illicit re-transfers of American technology to pressurise Israel to reconsider military relations with China. Phalcon controversy was one such instance.

The pressure exerted on Israel to halt military exports to China since the early 1990s did not yield any visible effect. It was only in 2000 that Israel gave in to the pressure of the US to cancel the deal for Phalcon AWACS to China (Kumaraswamy 2005a). This controversy began when it agreed to install advanced early warning systems aboard a Russian platform, Ilyushin (IL)-76. The controversy increased the tension between Israel, China, and US, too. When it was forced to choose between China and the US, Israel settled for maintaining close ties with its largest aid provider. The arms sales which played a pivotal role in normalising the relationship with China became a major irritant. The US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region resulted into this debacle. This controversy should not be viewed in isolation but should be seen it as a continuation of US's displeasure over the Sino-Israeli military relations, which ultimately got severed.

Israel was caught in this controversy as it did not pay attention to the earlier warning of the US for its arms sales to China and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's "failure to listen to the warning on this issue led to extensive damage to US-Israel relations"

(Ibid: 96). On a similar note, Israeli expert Shai Feldman noted that, “Israel must exercise caution in all matters related to selling arms to China and transferring military technology to it” (Feldman 2000: 20). Before the US, which provided billion of dollars as military aid, the ability of Israel to manoeuvre independent arms sales policies became limited. This particular controversy undermined Israel’s status as a reliable arms supplier.

Tracing the roots of the controversy, the negotiation for the Phalcon AWACS began from 1994. Under an agreement signed in 1996 by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel was supposed to export four such AWACS to China at a cost of US\$1 billion, with a price tag of US\$250 million for each system. In 1997, Israel reached an agreement with Russia to develop the aircraft jointly, where the latter would supply the aircraft itself and the radar to be added by Israel (Myers 1999). It was expected that China’s acquisition of such sophisticated airborne radar system would enhance its intelligence gathering capability, and the Chinese commanders could control the aircraft from a distance (Shai 2009: 26). To enhance its military capability, China sought to modernise its military by procuring four to eight Phalcons which would enable tracking of “60 planes and ships within a several hundred mile radius reaching across the Taiwan Straits and into the South China Sea” (Adelman 2002: 1).

The deal was formally finalised in 1998. The timing of this deal concerned the US as there was a near military confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan (Lin 2013: 63). With this development in the Asia-Pacific region, the US began to intensify its pressures to stop the Phalcon deal. The half-completed Russian aircraft Ilyushin-76 outfitted with the radar reached Israel on 25 October 1999, and this further troubled the Pentagon officials. In late 1999, the Pentagon and the Clinton administration were concerned that the US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific would be affected by the Phalcon. Senior Pentagon officials said that “It is a significant capability, and it will improve significantly China’s ability to conduct operations in and around the Taiwan Strait. That obviously is our major security interest in the region” (Myers 1999). The US tried to persuade Israel but there was no breakthrough.

As Israel did not comply with its requests, the US began to deploy other tactics. From early 2000, the issue of cutting military aid to Israel surfaced. In June, Sonny Callahan, a Republican of Alabama, who was also the chairman of the US House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, said that he would block US\$250 million in military aid to Israel if the latter were to sell the system (*The Washington Post* 2000a, Mark 2001: 9). During the visit of US Defence Secretary William S. Cohen to Israel in 2000, this issue was raised and he even pressurised Barak to cancel the deal with China. By this time, Israel had already signed a contract to supply with one Phalcon AWACS. The heightened tension arose at the time of Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Israel in April 2000. As the controversy gained momentum, the Chinese leader had to leave with the issue over arms sales unresolved. After Zemin's departure, under intense pressure, Israel had decided to call off the deal just a few hours before the US Congress was about to announce its termination of financial aid to Israel. Eventually, on 12 July 2000, that is, on the second day of the Camp David summit meeting between the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Clinton, Barak announced the cancellation of Phalcon deal (Perlez 2000). Due to the extraordinary leverage enjoyed by the US over Israel, the latter succumbed to the former's pressure. Compared to the Chinese defence market, the value of the US military assistance was more important for Israel, as a result, it had opted to stay with the latter.

As a scholar aptly puts it: "The manner in which the Phalcon cancellation was presented to and understood by the outside world indicates Israel's strategic vulnerability vis-à-vis the United States" (Kumaraswamy 2005a: 98). While it stopped the sale to China, the US allowed Israel to supply the same system to India. It did not view the burgeoning military ties between Israel and India with concerns as it did in the case of China. This clearly reflected its strategic calculations vis-à-vis China after the demise of the Soviet Union. Israel "overlooked" the "American concerns the rising military might of China, and it failed to comprehend post-Cold War American interests, especially in the Asia-Pacific region" (Ibid.).

Israel's last minute decision to side with the US was seen as a move aimed at improving mood in the Congress so that it would be in a better position to receive more military aid from the latter if any peace deal was reached with the PLO.

Eventually it succumbed to the pressures from the US. An American daily said that one of Barak's main objectives at Camp David was,

That Israel should come away with an upgraded military relationship with the United States as compensation for any risks it might encounter in compromising with the Palestinians. If a full peace accord is reached at Camp David, Israel expects to get a significant increase in its defence capabilities from the United States, including radar to detect missiles from Iran and Iraq. This year, of a \$2.8 billion aid package to Israel, \$1.98 billion was for military assistance (Perlez 2000).

In the words of Israel's first ambassador to China, Zev Suffot, "Israel's priority in international interest is relationship with the US, and not China, so if the pressure is powerful and strong enough, I think we'll have to give up on this" (Abadi 2004: 90). Such statement signified the space the US had occupied in Israel's foreign policy. More than criticising the supplier for its non-compliance to its assurances, China loathed the role of the US in halting Israel's arms sales (Kodner 2005).

As the Phalcon controversy demonstrated, the US's stance could quickly shift from being an observer to a participant when it considers its interest to be at stake (Kogan 2004). The fear that its strategic positions in the Taiwan Straits would be challenged by the Chinese military made the US prevent arms deals between Israel and China. The unrelenting political pressure exerted on Israel to cancel the Phalcon deal highlighted the delicate balance it had to maintain between the demands of the US and the growing dissatisfaction from China. The interfering role played by the US was criticised by the Chinese authorities. On the other hand, Israel was aware of the ramifications of its move upon the "painstaking(ly) crafted relationship with China" in the past (Kumaraswamy 2005a: 100). In March 2002, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres visited Beijing a couple of times to express Israel's regret over the entire controversy. There were talks regarding the compensation Israel had to pay to China. However, Israel's inability to fulfil its contractual obligation impeded its overall relations with China.

According to the US security establishments, the acquisition of sophisticated AWACS by the Chinese military carried high risks to its troops stationed in the Asia-Pacific region. The objective of the US in scuttling this deal was driven by its national and strategic interests in the region. This rationale of the US was criticised by scholars such as Shichor who was of the view that the issue surrounding the Phalcon

controversy was less to do with of illegal transfers of US-origin military technology. Shichor mentioned that the change of the US policy was mainly driven by their concern over, "...the disruption and destabilising of the East Asian military balance of power, first and foremost in the Taiwan Straits, and the undermining of the U.S. interests in the region and the risks to the US troops..."(Shichor 2000). The author found this a "ludicrous argument". To him, it was the US military presence in the region that fuelled more tensions and the belief that China posed a major threat to the regional stability was also refuted. The interventionist role played by the US in the regional disputes between China and Taiwan would perhaps further fuel instability the region.

Furthermore, if the size and the might of their respective military capability were to be compared, the US should have not have been threatened by China regarding strategic importance of the region. Rather the US should have been cautious that there would be other arms exporters, who would have been ready to supply China with such sophisticated weapons systems, if not Israel. By cancelling the Phalcon deal, the US indirectly compelled China to procure similar systems from other sources and in larger quantities. Shichor mentioned that this claim about the Chinese threat to its interests seemed rather "illogical and artificial" (Ibid.).

The cancellation of the contractual agreement of Phalcon proved the extent of seriousness of US on Israel's arms export policies. The interfering role carried the higher risk of affecting relations between Israel and those countries seeking military supplies from it. It was becoming more of a norm that it would have to take prior permission from the US for any sale of military items to different clients. As in the case of China, the US would not allow Israel to exports arms to those countries with which it had difficult relations or political differences. As a result, the US veto power had far-reaching implications. Under such circumstances, Israel's ability to fulfil its obligations would depend entirely on the political calculations of the US (Kumaraswamy 2006b: 400). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, China not only lost its relevance to US strategic calculation but also emerged as a potential threat to the new US hegemony (Ibid 2005a: 99). The implication of this influence created a sense of mistrust between Israel and the US as well.

As Israel's relations with different countries during the 1990s had strong military-security components, the Phalcon crisis dented its credibility as a reliable arms supplier. As noted by Kumaraswamy, "Countries must now consider that the Israeli arms market might be off-limits should they policy differences with Washington. Many find it easier to deal with Washington directly rather than negotiate with an unreliable Israel" (Ibid 2006a: 40). Its inability to escape the veto power of the US curtailed its prospects to become an independent arms exporter.

Considering fewer potential markets for Israel, the Phalcon deal could have been of utmost importance to the country. China could have provided the much needed jobs for those who were employed in Israel defence industries. It could have been a good way of strengthening their economic relations as China was considered a lucrative market of the time but the relationship between them soured after this particular episode.

### *c. Arrow*

As discussed in Chapter Five, the groundwork for the Israeli-US cooperation on Arrow missile programme was first laid in 1983, under the leadership of President Ronald Regan. This programme was also known as Star Wars Programme, and its primary objective was to protect against enemy missile attacks (Bahbah 1987c: 5). In May 1986, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US, Israel became the first non-NATO country to participate in such an initiative. Israel's defence ministry was interested in pursuing the programme as it feared missile attacks from its regional adversaries. This was another project which involved a massive US financial and technological assistance, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) even considered it as the "centrepiece" of the "strategic cooperation between the two countries" (Clarke 1994: 475). Over a period of time, the US began to have a considerable leverage on this project and prevented Israel from exporting it.

There were other related problems that emerged out of cooperation in the production of this anti-missile system. According to Duncan L. Clarke:

The Arrow's importance extends well beyond the program itself. It highlights several issues affecting overall US-Israeli: the awkward, unbalanced nature of strategic and defence cooperation; illicit transfer

of advances US technologies; Washington's disinclination to monitor effectively even very expensive and sensitive programs with Israel; the tension between the prospects for Middle East arms control and US policies/practices toward Israel; and the persistence of costly aid programs to Israel even as the foreign assistance budget shrinks and new aid priorities arise (Ibid: 476).

Ever since the inception of the Arrow missile programme, Israel was expected to gain considerable access to the US defence technology apart from the financial assistance and this raised serious technology transfers issues in the US

Under a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed by both the countries in 1991, any technologies associated with the Arrow missile would be under the US control and no such technologies would be allowed to transfer to other third parties or could be used in any projects undertaken by Israel without prior permission from Washington D.C. (Ibid: 479, 485). The US government was not convinced that Israel would adhere to such agreements, especially in the light of the Phalcon controversy.

Although there was no confirmation, China was suspected of receiving Arrow missile technology from Israel. What added to the US suspicion was that Dov Raviv, who was the head for the Arrow project at Israel Aircraft Industries, was found guilty accepting bribes from a Canadian supplier of parts for Arrow missile (JTA 1993). He allegedly accepted a bribe of US\$175,000 and the matter was viewed seriously as Raviv was considered "as the brain behind some of Israel's most advanced weapons projects" (JTA 1993). This speculation emerged as Israel had become "China's principal source advanced defence technology and is widely viewed as China's back door' to US technology" (Clarke 1994: 483-484). Unlike the Phalcon debacle, there was no major fallout in the relations between these three countries.

#### d. *Transfer of Lavi Technology*

Israel offered China with more advanced military hardware, including technologies associated with the Lavi fighter project. During the early stages of the project, China was allegedly asked whether it would be interested in buying any of the jets when exports began after the completion of the production (Melman and Sinai 1987: 404). This did not elicit a favourable response for Israel. Given its interest in developing aircraft, the offer appeared to be "attractive and should be mutually beneficial" (Kumaraswamy 1994b: 42). Seven years after the Lavi project was terminated, during



late 1994, Israel was accused of collaborating with China in the development of Chinese fighter jet, J-10. China had started the programme for J-10 in the late 1980s, and it was reportedly based on Israeli designs with Russian components as well.

When the reports of collaboration emerged, US officials said that Israel and China had already finished working on a prototype and the production was about to begin at a plant in the Sichuan province capital of Chengdu in China (Mann 1994). As a *Congressional Research Service* (CRS) report documented, Office of the Naval Intelligence (ONI) reported that China acquired U.S technology from Israel “in the form of Lavi fighter and possibly SAM [Surface-to-air missile] technology (Sharp 2012:18). It was suspected that Israel transferred some of the technologies meant for the Lavi, such as radar and avionics. There was a speculation that the radar and fire-control system in the J-10 jet was the Israeli-made ELM-2021 system, which had the capability of tracking “six air targets and lock on to the four most threatening targets for destruction” (Isenberg 2002, Gee 2007).

Alleged transfers of Lavi plans to China came to notice when a US surveillance satellite orbiting over China spotted several new fighter jets on the runway of a Chinese air base which was mainly used for tests and evaluation of prototype aircraft (Kennedy 1996: 12). The CIA which examined various images taken during the surveillance said that the Chinese jets were a copy of the Lavi. One of the main proponents of this aborted Israeli-US joint project, George Schultz, who was the US Secretary of State in the Reagan administration, labelled his advocacy of the Lavi program a “costly mistake” (Isenberg 2002). The news of Israel’s connection with the Chinese fighter upset the US due to the latter’s strategic interests in the Taiwan Straits. For the US, Israel’s alleged assistance in helping China’s air force modernisation programme carried negative implications for Taiwan.

Another reason why the US considered such activities to be a threat was Israel often retransferred these defence products to states that were potentially hostile to the US or were blatantly violating human rights issues. The latter was a primary reason in Chinese case especially after the 1989 Tiananmen incident. In short, such shadowed activities pertaining to technology transfers undermined the US commercial interests

(Klieman 1985 182-183) and they led to the upsetting of regional stability, and the straining of diplomatic relations.

*e. Other Issues*

During mid-October 1993, China's acquisition of advanced military technology for jet fighters, air-to-air missiles and tanks from Israel had become an important issue in the US. The CIA again talked about several arms deals worth "several billion dollars" between Israel and China (Gordon 1993a).

The agency further mentioned an agreement signed by both these countries for sharing technology in areas related to electronics and space. Along with this, the US officials reminded about the offices of Israeli military firms that were opened in China for selling military products. The US agency perceived that as China was undergoing military modernisation programmes, and it was of the belief that China would tap Israeli expertise in the development of military technologies such as advanced tank power plants and radar systems. In order to fund military modernisation programmes, China began to sell arms to Iran with the aim to earn hard currency (Rynhold 1996: 106). In the report released by the CIA, there was no mention of Israel's retransfers of US-origin technology to China but a possibility of such dealings had become a major concern to the US officials. The allegation on Israel about conducting lucrative arms deals with China was rejected by Rabin but he mentioned that Israel sold "goods" to China worth over US\$60 million during 1992 and 1993 (*Los Angeles Times* 1993).

Military hardware allegedly transferred to China included Israel's Python-3 air-to-air missiles (AAM) (Shichor 2000). The US believed that this technology was adapted from the US AIM-9L Sidewinder missile, and contained a high degree of US technology. Israel was suspected to have sold these missiles to Thailand and China. The American's worst nightmare was the apparent sale of China's version of Python-3 to Iraq (Clarke 1995: 105). Chinese anti-missile systems such as YJ-12A and YJ-62, and YJ-61 antiradar missiles were based on Israel's Python-3 (Clarke and Johnston 1999: 209). The MAPATZ anti-tank missile was allegedly based on the US made-TOW2 (tube -launched, Optically Tracked, Wire Guided) (Shichor 2000). The US officials had major concerns when Israel and China discussed negotiations for Israel's Python-4 air-to-air missile manufactured by Israeli firm Elbit and was

considered to be the most lethal short-range air-to-air missile that was in service during the late 1990s. This was used in conjunction with an advanced helmet-mounted sight jointly developed by Israeli and US defence firms. Israel's proposed sale to China was questioned by the US defence officials as such sophisticated missile technology would enhance Chinese military capability which could "further erode America's military edge in Asia" (Twing 1998: 25). China's burgeoning military ties with countries such as Syria and Iran were watched with concern by the US, and it feared that such systems could be reengineered by China and sold to these adversaries.

All the alleged retransfers of military technologies irked the US to a great extent and this heightened its fears about China's rising military capabilities in the region. Along with this, the skills of the Chinese to undergo reverse engineering of the military hardware made the US maintain a strong objection to arms sales. In regard to its strategic interests, US officials were of the view that the fighter jet, missiles and other sophisticated military items possessed by China would be detrimental to its troops stationed in Taiwan. During the mid-1990s, there were increasingly animosities between China and Taiwan and this prompted Clinton to deploy its navy carriers, *USS Independence* and *USS Nimitz* to the Taiwan Straits. This act of the US sent a strong signal that it remained committed to defend Taiwan (Lin 2010: 7), and as a result, considered China a potential military threat during the 1990s. The US had used these issues as a pretext to scuttle Israel's arms exports to China during the 1990s.

In the words of a scholar,

One might argue with the logic of the American thinking or suggest that it has exaggerated the role of Israel in contributing to China's military might. The manner in which Washington has periodically harped on this issue, and the pressure tactics it has used to scuttle some of the deals, clearly indicate an American obsession over China's potential to undermine its interests (Kumaraswamy 2006b: 400).

Despite the US disapproval, both the countries cooperated on military spheres.

The accusations of the US were an indication that it did not see the growing military relations between the two countries that just established diplomatic ties in a good light. Israel failed to recognise the shift that ushered in the US policies after the Cold

War was over. The failure to read these signals led to the devastating incidents like the Phalcon controversy.

The military modernisation programmes of China in the 1990s were considered a looming threat to the US, particularly considering the latter's strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. In the light of this, China's territorial claims, its "lack of commitment to international security treaties, and force projection ambitions" were considered to be concerning factors not only for the US but also for the neighbouring countries in the region (Mathews 1998: 39). Although the modernisation efforts did not result in the production of highly offensive capability, the US remained wary about the progress the Chinese defence industries would make in the medium to long term. On the other hand, this threat perception of the US was downplayed, and as mentioned by one,

The state of the Chinese military and its modernisation must also be put in the context of U.S. interests in East Asia and compared with the state and modernisation of the U.S. military and other militaries in East Asia, especially the Taiwanese military. Viewed in that context, China's military modernisation does not look especially threatening... modernisation is more rapid than before but is not a massive Soviet-style military build-up. As the Chinese economy grows and China becomes a great power, the United States should accept that it, like other great powers, will want more influence over its region. If kept within bounds, that increased sphere of influence should not threaten vital U.S. interests (Eland 2003: 1, 12).

The Bush administration, however, perceived the changes in the status quo in the Asia-Pacific region as a major challenge to its vital strategic interests. It was due to its intervention that the Sino-Israeli arms trade came to an end in 2000.

From the series of controversies highlighted earlier in this chapter, it is evident that from mid-1980s, Israeli arms sales activities were under the strict surveillance. While the initial concerns of the US revolved around illegal or unauthorised transfers of American-origin military technologies, the rising economic and military capabilities of China after the end of the Cold War remained an important factor. By threatening to cancel its annual military, the US had been successful in preventing Israel from selling arms to China after 2000. The aid recipient did not like to risk losing the military grant that, in 2000 reached US\$3.12 billion out of the total US aid worth US\$4.12 billion (Clyde 2002a: 12).

It is known that the role of the US in Israel's military ties with countries such as South Africa and China, during the early and late 1990s, respectively, had been very negative. Depending upon its strategic interests, the US encouraged Israel to forge stronger military ties with both the countries, and later, began to exhibit displeasure over the same activities. The problems that emerged out of Israel's arms exports to China after the establishment of diplomatic relations became a curse to former's defence industries that depended on foreign sales to sustain their Research and Development (R&D) programmes.

### *South Africa*

As it happened with China, the US also pressurised Israel to halt its arms exports to South Africa's *apartheid* regime. Earlier, Cold War calculations had promoted arms exports to South Africa, particularly, during the 1970s and early 1980s. An important reason as to why the US supported this military-security cooperation was to keep a check on the rising influence of the Soviet-backed rebels in the neighbouring Angola. Israel was used to thwart the expansionist policy of the Soviets in the African region.

Military relations during the *apartheid* regime had been considered as the most important pillar of their bilateral ties. The Chapter Four examined the nature of their military cooperation, and particularly Israel's arms exports which continued despite the United Nations (UN)-imposed arms embargo in 1977. Most of their military dealing took place between mid-1970s and mid-1980s. By 1979, South Africa had emerged as the single largest destination for Israeli arms, and accounted for approximately 35 percent of the Jewish state's total military exports (SIPRI 1980: 86, Klieman 1985: 139). Some attributed their robust military ties to the ideological affinities between Israel and South Africa (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 182). The fall of Iran's monarchical regime had further facilitated a strong military cooperation between Israel and South Africa. During the 1980s, Israeli leaders such as Peres were instrumental in strengthening the military cooperation between the two countries. From South Africa, Israel's military industries earned between US\$400 million to US\$800 million in 1986, through the export of military equipments and know-how (Friedman 1987d). This is a significant figure considering that both had conducted covert arms trade against the backdrop of an existing arms embargo which Israel also

supported. That it could manage military ties with South Africa for little more than a decade was an achievement.

During the peak of their military relations, some of the most important elements could be identified. Apart from traditional arms exports to the *apartheid* regime, both the countries conducted military training programmes, courses on helicopter assault, air supply and anti-tank infantry. They cooperated in the development of fighter jets and missile systems. Apart from counterterrorism measures, they were also engaged in the nuclear technologies. Israel played an important role in upgrading the South African defence industries, particularly the aircraft industries.

Israel's alleged cooperation with South Africa on nuclear capabilities and long-range missiles were a major concern for the US. When their military cooperation intensified, the US began to closely monitor since late 1979 after the American surveillance satellite VELA 6911 recorded a huge flash which was believed to be out of a "clandestine nuclear test" conducted by Israel and South Africa (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 136). US President Jimmy Carter took immense interest in finding out the exact nature of Israel-South Africa military cooperation. At this point of time, there were no indications of his administration pressurising on Israel to curb its military cooperation with the *apartheid* regime.

The US pressure on Israel to halt arms sales to South Africa was mainly driven out of the growing international concerns over the *apartheid* regime. Added to this, changes its policy towards South Africa from the early 1980s paved the way for the eventual break up of military ties between Israel and South Africa (Ibid: 148-149). The US Cold War calculations could be applied in the case of the Israeli-South African military ties. When the Cold War was coming to an end, the US began to envision of an international order where it would remain the sole superpower. As a result, it wanted to cultivate better ties with different countries, including South Africa.

This motive of the US coincided with the rising anti-*apartheid* protests in different parts of the country. For example, between 1981 and 1983, there were heightened campaigns throughout the US, mostly in educational campuses, for academic divestments against the *apartheid* regime. In the words of Sasha Polakow-Suransky:

Thousands of leftist students across the country pressured university administrators to remove South African investments from their portfolios, making abolition of *apartheid* the focus of campus political activism in much the same way civil rights and Vietnam had begun in the 1960s and 1970 (Ibid: 148).

As the result of the domestic pressures, calls to end to the *apartheid* regime increased gradually.

Several movements all over the US started due to which many universities had to end their investments in South Africa. Israel observed the unfolding development cautiously, and its first concern was the military ties which were kept in secrecy. Most of military visits were conducted as business trips. While the media was aware of the existence of robust military cooperation, the presence of a large number of South African defence officials in Israel was not known and those South African officials had fears about their covert military ties getting exposed. Simultaneously, both the countries became more concerned due to growing anti-*apartheid* sentiments in the US. The US factor in the Israeli-South African military cooperation was mainly shaped by the changing developments not only within the US but also in international politics.

Although many in the US had begun to exhibit their anti-*apartheid* stance since the early 1980s, it was from the mid-1980s the military cooperation was viewed with concerns. Such resentments were further fuelled by the brutalities of the South African regime that had begun to be exposed in the media, particularly in Europe and the US (Ibid: 180). There were mounting and persistent pressures against the *apartheid* regime and this triggered several economic sanctions. In September 1985, European Community imposed limited trade and financial sanctions on South Africa, and this was followed by similar sanctions by the Commonwealth countries in October (Levy 1999). The US administration under President Ronald Reagan opposed many of such sanctions but he imposed a limited ban of exports to South Africa.

In consonance with these sanctions, vigorous efforts had begun to strengthen the ban on exports to South Africa. The rising activities of the South African defence industries, which was mainly centralised by Armaments Corporation (ARMSCOR), attributed to the efforts of the international community to impose sanctions. By 1984,

arms industry in South Africa had reached a remarkable level of sophistication, and this had enabled the country to meet most of its domestic military needs (Terrill 1984: 3-13). Around this time, ARMSCOR endeavoured to increase its arms exports from US\$10 million to anywhere between US\$100 and US\$150 million annually (Terrill 1984: 8). Potential military export items included missiles, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and naval crafts. These are the types of military items that were supplied by Israel to South Africa during their military cooperation. Beyond arms trade, Israel even licensed production of a few of its weapons systems in South Africa, and this included Reshef patrol boats, Dabur patrol boats, Uzi submachine gun, and unconfirmed reports for the production of submarines (Hunter 1987a: 42-43). At this stage, when South African arms sales were rising with a strong cooperation with Israel, the US had thought of a more serious sanction on the *apartheid* regime. This move coalesced with various other attempts to end the *apartheid* rule in South Africa.

As sanctions against South Africa increased, particularly from 1986, Israel became concerned about its military ties with the *apartheid* regime. In the words of Joel Peters:

It was not until the end of 1986 that the Israeli government decided to undertake a thorough review of its links with South Africa. This reevaluation was not prompted, however, by considerations for its African policy but rather by the imposition of limited economic sanctions on South Africa by the EEC [European Economic Community] and the possibility that the United States Congress might cut aid to states selling arms or military technology to South Africa (Peters 1992: 167).

On 2 October 1986, the US passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA) and until then the Israeli government did not pay much attention to it. However, the amendment titled Section 508, which was reintroduced by Senator John Kerry on 1 August 1986, became problematic for Israel (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195). It read:

- (a) The President shall conduct a study on the extent to which the international embargo on the sale and exports of arms and military technology to South Africa is being violated.
- (b) Not later than 179 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the President shall submit to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate a report setting forth the findings of the study required by subsection (a), including an identification of those countries engaged in such sale



or export, with a view of terminating United States military assistance to those countries (US Government 1986).

The introduction of such acts which carried the threat of cancelling US military aid became a concern, although Israel still did not take it seriously earlier. In 1986, a *Congressional Research Service* report stated that the US provided Israel with military grant worth US\$1,722.6 million, and the latter would not like to lose such a huge aid (Sharp 2012: 32). Snapping of military ties would hamper Israel's economy that largely depended on arms exports, not only to South Africa but to other countries as well.

While the US came up with the CAAA, a division within the Israeli political establishment also ensued up. There were a few left-wing leaders such as Yossi Sarid, Mordechai Virshouovski and Matityahu Peled who called for the imposition of sanctions on South Africa while several right wing members of the Knesset continued to support the South African *apartheid* regime (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 191). Emergence of such divergent views on South Africa led to a clash between the officials of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and with that of the security establishment. As Polakow-Suransky observed, "The left believed that the *apartheid* regime's days were numbered, while the top brass and their political allies insisted that white rule was there to stay. The result was a complete policy breakdown" (Ibid.).

The views of the left wing parliamentarians, who supported sanctions on South Africa, came much to the dismay of the right wing politicians who would like to continue strong military ties with South Africa. As a part of the sanctions, these left leaders urged the government to stop all military exports to South Africa. It is understood that the pressure of the US to curb arms sales to South Africa was also welcomed by a few within the Israeli society itself. Even the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) pressurised to scale down ties with the *apartheid* regime (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195, Friedman 1987f). Sensing the strong anti-*apartheid* stand of the US, AIPAC did not like to see Israel's image being tarnished in the US. The biggest fear was the possible cutting of US military aid if arms sales to South Africa were to continue.

In a situation when was the country was pressurised to curb arms sales, Defence Minister Rabin had little choice but to reconsider his policies towards South Africa. Rabin's role was surprising as he was one of the ardent advocates of Israel-South African relations, but at the same time, he was influenced by the mounting threats of deterioration of his country's ties with the US. As with China, the threat of losing the annual military aid was a serious matter. Israel would have liked to avoid such an eventuality as it took them several years to convince the US to provide military-security assistance. Israel would not want to jeopardise its relations with the US by not giving up military ties with South Africa.

By the beginning of 1987, the pressure to cut off military ties with South Africa increased tremendously. The US State Department almost finished preparing the report to the Congress in which Israel was included as one of the violators of the arm embargo against South Africa (Sheppard Jr. 1987, Polakow-Suransky 2011: 195). Having no other options left, Israel finally decided to impose sanctions on South Africa. Yossi Beilin, who was Israel's Director General of Foreign Ministry, talked about adopting sanctions along the line of U.S and Western European countries (JTA 1987a). Around the same time, the US State Department was preparing a Congressional report by identifying countries that did not adhere to the arms embargo imposed against the *apartheid* regime.

In February 1987, Israeli officials had agreed to put an end to its arms sales and transfer of military technology to South Africa. This agreement was arrived after a close consultation among Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Peres and Rabin. A report that emerged during this time stated that, "the agreement... is seen as representing a compromise between those Israelis who want their country to take a much more aggressive anti-apartheid stance and others who defend the status quo in Israel-South African relations" (Fisher 1987c). It is evident that there were visible fissures within the establishment over the ties with South Africa. Some American Jewish leaders urged Israel to adopt a more rigid "public stance against the South African regime" (Ibid.). As a damage-control policy, the Israeli prime minister tried to shield the emerging development in his foreign policy which had become increasingly anti-*apartheid*. By agreeing to curb arms sales, officials were also aware that such moves could antagonise South Africa. The same report also mentioned of an investigation

conducted by the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research on military relations with South Africa. There was widespread concern that Israel's name would crop up as a main supplier of military items to the *apartheid* regime. Such outcome would give enough reasons to the US Congress to cut its US\$1.8 billion annual military aid.

At this juncture when a few in Israel expected that the US Congress would cut off the annual military aid, there was a fear of other repercussions as well. One of them was that the country could face a strong political backlash from the US, which could be even more damaging to their ties (Ibid 1987a). Due to this, the Israeli officials assured the US that it would discontinue with its military relationship with South Africa. The Israeli government hoped that the Reagan administration and the US Congress would not publicly condemn them if the investigation would accuse Israel of violating arms embargo against South Africa (Ibid 1987c). Considering the economic loss that it could face, officials had hoped that they would be able to convince the US Congress "into overlooking the Israeli military relationship with South Africa" (Friedman 1987b; Fisher 1987a). They were concerned over thousands of jobs in the economically-troubled military industries of Israel that depended on arms trade.

When the report of Israel's agreement to end military relationship with South Africa surfaced, there were confusions regarding its intentions. Amid this, the government confirmed that the actual plan was to "phase out the agreements gradually" (Fisher 1987f). This means that putting an abrupt end to the military ties would incur heavy economical losses to the arms supplier and the recipient. In tune with the decision to curb military ties with South Africa, in late February 1987, Israel said that it would need at least four years to complete all the existing military-industrial contracts it signed with the *apartheid* regime. By not delivering on those contracts, it could meet with heavy economic loss of up to US\$500 million in arms business, and a few "hundreds of millions of dollars" in lawsuits (Ibid 1987d). In case of an immediate severance of ties, the greatest damage would be caused on Israel's aircraft industries and other defence industries would also suffer the same plight. Despite these economic considerations, the implication of losing US military back-up was more threatening to Israel than losing the South African defence market. As a result, the decision to end military ties was mainly taken under the intense pressure of the US.

Finally on 18 March 1987, Israel's Inner Cabinet decided to reduce contacts with the *apartheid* regime and agreed not to sign any new contacts with that country (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1987b). Along with this decision, Israel had agreed to scale back its relations with South Africa. Such a huge step was taken up as a pre-emptive measure from going into any controversy with the US. As observed by a scholar,

The Israel resolution mandated that the government “refrain from new undertakings, between Israel and South Africa, in the realm of defence” and established a working group to consider further sanctions “in line with the policy in practices in the Free World (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 198).

On a similar note, *The New York Times* reported that:

In addition to the ban on new military sales, the Cabinet decided to limit further Israel's cultural, official and tourist relations with South Africa and to set up a committee to recommend possible areas for economic sanctions in line with steps adopted by other nations (Friedman 1987d).

Once this resolution was passed, there were several reactions within the Israeli political circles.

Some in the government called the decision “point of no return”, particularly due to the complex ties with South Africa, while there were others who felt that there would not be any practical impact on Israel (Fisher 1987c). A few officials who supported the plan were of the view that Israel's relations with South Africa were blown out of proportion and the cutting of military tie was meaningful (Friedman 1987c). They even criticised the government for being irresponsible and for not taking such steps earlier. These criticisms were an indication that a new type of relationship between the two countries was evolving. The US pressure came in favour to those Israeli officials who became increasingly critical of the *apartheid* regime.

A US State Department official spokesperson Charles Redman considered Israel's move as a “positive development” (Fisher 1987c). By the time it complied with the US, Israel had already signed military contracts with South Africa which would expand beyond three to four years. As a result, there remained certain uncertainties as to whether Israel would abide by its decision to halt exporting arms. Considering its experience in carrying out clandestine arms trade, there had been elements of

scepticisms. This uncertainty was expressed by Thomas L. Friedman when he said, “Few people know how much longer existing contracts have to run or whether they include renewal arrangements that would technically not involve signing new contracts” (Friedman 1987b).

Around this time there was an increased monitoring of their alleged cooperation on nuclear cooperation. This coincided with the efforts of the US in 1987 to prevent the spread of missiles including ballistic, cruise, space launch vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and remotely piloted vehicles that could be used for chemical, biological and nuclear attacks (Missile Technology Control Regime 2009). Although this aspect of nuclear cooperation between Israel and South Africa was kept in utmost secrecy, the issue had been speculated upon and was widely reported (Aronson and Brosh 1992: 266, Liberman 2004:1). South Africa, rich in resources and money, helped Israel with funds for the development of new weapons systems, and in turn the latter granted licenses for production and technology. The changing international politics since the late 1980s became a major stumbling block in Israel-South African military ties.

As the Jewish factor always played a pivotal role in Israeli foreign policy, the snapping of military ties was expected to have an impact on the Jewish population in South Africa which stood approximately around 115,000 Jews (Fisher 1987c). One of the important concerns was that South Africa might not allow its Jewish citizens to transfer money for further investments in Israel. From this it became evident that it was not only the arms trade or the overall military ties that were likely to be affected but also the economies of many Israeli in the defence industries.

After Israel announced the ending of military ties with South Africa, the latter blamed the US. The US foreign policy towards the end of the 1980s was becoming more anti-*apartheid* and one of the earliest criticisms came from South African Foreign Minister Roelof F. Botha who said, “The decision of the Israeli Government is clearly a direct result of pressure by the United States. The measures adopted, however, do not go farther than those adopted by European countries” (Battersby 1987a). He did not openly criticise Israel primarily to avoid any potential degradation or damage to their longstanding ties. Both the countries had been cooperating in various aspects of military-security arenas, and most of them were carried out far from the glance of the

public. It was secretive and special. South African officials, at the same time, understood well that Israel had to take up such a decision to thwart any untoward actions from the US and other European nations. The pressure from the US to cut military ties was also intensified. Moreover, considering the significant nature of their relations, South Africa did not like to jeopardise its military ties by condemning its military partner.

Amid the rising criticisms from South Africa against the US pressure, a radio commentary in the state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation said, “One sad aspect of this development is the international blackmail role--the bully boy tactics--that the United States Congress has now resorted to in its vendetta against South Africa” (*Los Angeles Times* 1987). Such statements highlighted the rising tensions between South Africa and the US over *apartheid*.

Simultaneously, Israel’s minister without portfolio at the time Arens condemned his country’s sanction on South Africa which was spearheaded by the US. Arens defended arms sales to South Africa and expressed that his country had to export arms to maintain defence industry, and without which there would be survival difficulties (*Los Angeles Times* 1987). He laid emphasis on the importance of arms exports in foreign policy pursuits as well economy of the country. In his words,

In 1973 Israel found itself isolated and beleaguered in Africa with countries which long benefited from relations with us cutting ties in hope of Arab cash from the oil boom. To find a country then that would be helpful to us in our hour of need was not easy. But the South African government was one such government which was ready to help (*Los Angeles Times* 1987).

By acknowledging the importance of South Africa, Arens personally urged to honour the arms contracts that existed at that time, and severely criticised the US for pressuring on his country to impose sanctions on the *apartheid* regime. To him, South Africa was a reliable and a trustworthy friend for many years, particularly by not siding with the Sub-Sahara African countries that distanced themselves and “denounced Zionism as racism” (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 198).

Just before the Israeli cabinet adopted the sanctions in March 1987, Harry Schwartz, a Member of Parliament (of South Africa) belonging to the Progressive Federal Party, also an official of the Jewish Board of Deputies, the leading Jewish organization in

South Africa, sent a telegram to Israel's prime minister and foreign minister and appealed to "them not to support the sanctions or a policy of divestment in South Africa" (Battersby 1987b). As observed by one:

Mr. Schwarz said he could understand both Israel's objections to *apartheid* as well as the pressures that were being exerted on that country. But as a country that was itself subject to sanctions and boycotts, Israel should appreciate that such measures were not desirable and were often counterproductive (Battersby 1987b).

Despite the criticisms and anguish expressed by officials from Israel and South Africa, the US went ahead with its plan of action and investigated countries that were the suppliers of arms to South Africa by violating the 1977 UN-imposed arms embargo. The investigation would only not expose the names of the arms suppliers but also agencies who were involved in the trade, including private dealers and government agencies.

On 1 April 1987, the US State Department submitted a report to the Congress in which Israel had been identified as one of the violators of the 1977 arms embargo. The US government estimated that in 1986 alone Israel delivered to South Africa military items and technology worth US\$400 million to US\$800 million (Lewis 1987). This highlighted the magnitude of their military cooperation. The report went on to note that the Israeli government was fully aware of all or most of the arms transactions with South Africa even prior to their decision on 18 March that no existing military contract would be renewed (Lewis 1987). This report was a serious blow to Israel as its arms trade or military cooperation with South Africa was conducted on the government-to-government basis. The details of the weapons supplied to South Africa were not highlighted in the report, but it mentioned that the deals were the largest.

Some of key observations of the report include:

5. Most of the weapons acquired by South Africa were delivered prior to the 1977-arms embargo;
6. Israel appeared to have sold military systems and subsystems, and provided technical assistance to South Africa on a regular basis, even before the government announced its decision to curb military ties ;
7. No evidence has been found indicating that Israel supplied South Africa with US manufactured or licensed weapons. However, "in the

absence of inspection of Israeli-made or licensed weapons in South African hands” the US does not know whether South Africa has Israeli weapons that were made using US technology;

8. The embargo adopted by the UN Security Council made it mandatory not to supply weapons to South Africa, but only “called upon” countries to terminate contracts for maintaining weapons under existing contracts. This “limited exception” “does not authorise deliveries of arms under pre-existing contracts (JTA 1987c).

Scholars like Gerald Steinberg were of the view that “since the embargo covered weapons but not technology, Israel, like many other suppliers, could have transferred technology without actually violating the embargo” (Steinberg 1993).

On a similar note, Israel’s former ambassador to South Africa Eliahu Lankin condemned the US Congress for imposing pressure on his country. He mentioned that other violators of the arms embargo on South Africa would not be affected as much as Israel due to the large amount of US aid (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 199). After the US released the report, Rabin expressed his unhappiness and was concerned over the impact upon the Jewish community in South Africa. He also said that “South Africa... was the only country to send Israel badly needed spare parts for its French-built Mirage jets after the 1967 Six-Day War when France and other Western European countries imposed an arms embargo against Israel” (JTA 1987d). He related the South African case with that of arms embargo imposed against Israel in 1948 and 1967.

When Israel began to depend on the US arms and military aid, mainly after the October War, several scholars had already predicted that such dependence would one day emerge as a “potential area for U.S influence” (Reich 1984: 168). As expressed by Stewart Reiser:

Since Israel has become a coproducer of several weapons systems with the United States and a recipient of US technology and scientific data, the United States will again have the opportunity, if not political desire and will, to exert veto power on Israeli sales in the future (Ibid: 219).

This assumption had come true and, the US indeed wielded its veto power from time to time.

Apart from the reasons identified above, the prevailing nature of the US-South Africa relations also led to the pressure on Israel to end its military ties with the *apartheid* regime. There were no visible problems between Israel and the US. It was the rising



condemnation of the anti-*apartheid* regime in the US which had influenced its policies. This had also coalesced with the change in the political and strategic scenario in South Africa towards the end of the Cold War. With the Soviet threat dissipating from the African continent, the US no longer needed a counterweight to the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union.

Despite Israel's imposition of sanctions in March 1987, there were speculations that both the countries continued to conduct their military ties secretly. Security members did their best to preserve the military ties and gained as much export revenue as they could through such ties (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 200). While the details are sketchy, officials from Israeli air force and aircraft industry travelled to South Africa frequently and vice versa (Ibid: 215).

From late 1980s, many officials in the Israeli government were trying to revive ties with the Sub-Saharan African countries that snapped ties after the October War. Along with this, anti-*apartheid* stance in Israel also gained momentum. An Israeli foreign ministry official Shlomo Gur, who was closely associated with Beilin, began to take up initiatives to improve relations with many of the Sub-Saharan African leaders (Ibid: 201). He even tried to bring several members of various trade unions, who were also anti-*apartheid*, to his country. The primary motive for him was to show to those members that Israel was not an enemy for those nations. Although the visiting members and leaders were not very convinced by Gur's efforts, he succeeded in making them feel that there were quite a few in the government that did not promote the *apartheid* regime. A delegation of black American businessmen, politicians and clergy that visited Israel warned that many officials in the US were still concerned about Israel's ties with South Africa and "that the issue could cause Israel problems with Congress" (Frankel 1987). Peres informed the delegation about the scaling down of military and trade relations with South Africa. During this meeting, Peres vehemently denied the reports of nuclear cooperation and, he cited his country's decisions not to enter into new defence contracts with South Africa (JTA 1987d).

As warned by the American delegation, the AIPAC leaders began to see certain possibilities of losing US aid, if Israel would continue harbouring ties with the

*apartheid* regime. There was a tremendous pressure on Shamir to impose much harsher sanctions on South Africa (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 204). Israel had to give in to the pressure as the threats of cutting US military aid was perceived to be more dangerous than cutting down ties with South Africa.

On 16 September 1987, the Inner Cabinet of Israel again adopted comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, and the restrictions this time were more serious than that of March 1987 sanctions. The government announced the following: no new investments in South Africa, no new agreements in the area of science; import quota for iron and steel would be frozen, no promotion of tourism to South Africa; no visits to South Africa by Israeli civil servants, unless approved by an inter-ministerial committee, to prevent Israel from becoming a transit station of any kinds of goods and services from and to South Africa, the government would also establish funds to assist the implementation of training programmes in Israel; in the fields of educational, cultural and social fields, sports ties with South Africa would be subject to the decisions of the international sports associations; prohibition of granting of government loans, prohibition of sale and transfer of oil and its products; and the prohibition in the import of Kruggerands (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1987a). The decision did not mention anything about the existing arms defence contracts between the two countries. It became visible that the sanctions imposed by Israel did not have much impact on its trade with South Africa, including the defence trade. Most of the contracts both the countries signed before 1987 were apparently remained in effect.

As the earlier sanctions could not effectively curb the military ties, by the end of 1987, more rigorous steps were taken to monitor the close cooperation the two countries. The continuation of ties became an important issue in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as well. In November 1987, Israel had to vote against South Africa in the UNGA for the first time in almost two decades (United Nations General Assembly 1987). This was in tune with the efforts of the international community to condemn the *apartheid* regime. That said Israel went on to say that the existence of the diplomatic relations with South Africa “did not imply support for the policies of the South African government and consistently proclaimed its opposition to the system of *apartheid*” (Peters 1992: 168-169). According to many Israeli

leaders, maintaining cordial relations with South Africa was imperative to safeguard the interests of the South African Jewish community.

Along with this resolution, the UNGA also adopted another one concerning relations between these two countries. The resolution of the UNGA read:

1. Calls upon Israel to desist from and terminate forthwith all forms of military, nuclear, intelligence, economic and other collaboration, particularly its long-term contracts for military supplies to South Africa;
2. Further calls upon Israel to abide scrupulously by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council;
3. Requests the Special Committee against *Apartheid* to continue to monitor developments in the relations of Israel with South Africa, including the implementation of the measures recently announced by Israel;
4. Further requests the Special Committee to keep the matter under constant review and to report thereon to the General Assembly and the Security Council as appropriate (United Nations General Assembly 1987; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1987a).

Thus, along with the pressures of the US, the UN began to intensify its measures to put an end to the *apartheid* regime. In this regard, targeting the clandestine military ties between became an important priority for the US and other countries.

During the late 1980s, another issue that became a major concern to the US was the alleged cooperation in the field of long-range missiles capabilities. As discussed in Chapter four, this was evident from Israel's offer to sell the nuclear-capable Jericho missiles. Although Israel had started with its missile (R&D) activities in the late 1940s, its earliest products such as Luz surface-to-surface missiles and the Shafrir-1 did not meet significant success (Steinberg 1986: 176). The quest for nuclear-capable missiles started in the early 1960s when it ordered a surface-to-surface missile from Marcel Dassault, the French arms-maker (*The Risk Report* 1995). Due to the June War, Israel could not further its military ties with France as the latter imposed arms embargo. This hampered the military industrial development and arms procurement programme. The US gradually filled the void that was left by France, and emerged as Israel's biggest arms supplier from the early 1970s.

It was only from the 1970s that the efforts in missile productions began to see some dividends (Reiser 1989; Steinberg 1986). With the progression in this area, Israel had begun to work on a longer-range missile, also known as the Jericho-2, in the 1970s. This was one of the strategic systems developed by Israel and “The Jericho-2s inertial guidance system was apparently developed with the help of components smuggled out of the United States, as were elements of the solid fuel propellant and the shell of the missile itself” (*The Risk Report* 1995). This missile was test-fired in the Mediterranean Sea in May 1987, but there was no detailed information about its actual range, accuracy and the capability. Some of the analysis had assumed that it was nuclear capable with a range of “900 miles”, and could be launched from a truck or rail-based transporter-erector launchers (TELs) (Hoyt 2007: 104).

Ever since the reports of Israel’s offer of its Jericho missile to South Africa surfaced during the mid-1970s, there had been a close watch on their military cooperation, particularly, by the US (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 81-83). There were many media reports on the increasing cooperation between the two countries in the field of missile technology (Oren 2013, Kennedy 1995: 31, Steinbach 2002: 338). As Steinberg mentioned, “The links with Israel in this area apparently date to the 1970s, when the South African Skerpioen (Scorpion) ship-to-ship missile first appeared” (Steinberg 1993). Since the early 1980s, South Africa’s quest for long-range missile systems was on the rise due to its escalated tensions with several Cuban troops stationed in the neighbouring Angola. This coincided with the time when South Africa was undergoing a rapid military modernisation programme. As it did not have any such missile capability, South Africa depended on their ground troops and the air force, and was believed to have taken the help of Israel while giving “finishing touches on the nuclear-capable missiles being built in... Arniston” (Polakow-Suransky 2011:215). This sort of cooperation had raise concerns in the US.

One incident that had triggered a major concern in the US regarding the alleged missile cooperation was the plume of smoke that was detected by its surveillance satellite while passing over the Indian Ocean on 5 July 1989 (Ibid: 214). According to defence analysts in the US, the smoke that billowed appeared to be the “exhaust trail of a missile” and they were of the view that it was identical to that which was produced by Israeli-made Jericho-2 (Ibid: 214, Gordon 1989). Around this time the

Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 1987 was established as “an informal and voluntary association of countries which share the goals of non-proliferation of unmanned delivery systems capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction”, and the countries “seek to coordinate national export licensing efforts aimed at preventing their proliferation” (Missile Technology Control Regime). The unfolding incident had given the US a chance to put further pressure on Israel to give up its military ties with South Africa.

The possibility of Israel being a part of the test was drawn out of reports that had begun circulating in the US towards the end of 1989. In October 1989, the US officials, based on their intelligence reports said that South Africa received help while developing medium-range missile (Gordon 1989). Their assumptions were based on news piece released by *NBC News* which stated that Israel forged a secret joint partnership to produce nuclear-tipped missile for South Africa (*Los Angeles Times* 1989c). The report also mentioned:

The partnership reportedly has enabled Israel to gain access to a long-range missile site near Overberg, South Africa, and to acquire uranium for nuclear warheads. In exchange, Israel reportedly has shared missile technology with South Africa that will enable it to become a nuclear power (*Los Angeles Times* 1989c).

Further, officials in the Bush administration also said that the equipments seen during the South African missile test were similar to the ones used by Israel for their own tests (Gordon 1989).

At this time, the Israeli defence ministry reiterated its compliance to the March-1987 decisions and denied cooperation with South Africa on nuclear technology but did not give any information about its cooperation on contracts that existed before 1987. Shamir and Botha vehemently denied the reports of their alleged cooperation. Polakow-Suransky was of the view that the missile cooperation programme taken up by Israel and South Africa at Arniston dated back to 1984, and had become a part of an existing contract (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 216). As Israel agreed not to sign any new contracts after March 1987, the accusation of the West was considered to be “meaningless”.

However, with this sensitive development, the Bush administration began to take a keen interest on this particular event, and made known to the Israeli officials its opposition to the proliferation of ballistic missile technology. One of the critics to the US assumption was Steinberg who expressed that “This story was also based entirely on a combination of speculation and leaks from US government officials; whose access to information was limited and whose assessments have not always been accurate” (Steinberg 1993). Despite Israel’s denial of its involvement in missile technology cooperation with South Africa, the Bush administration became serious than ever before about the proliferation issue. Around this time, this administration was considering selling supercomputers to Israel’s Technion University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, but due to the ongoing investigation regarding the alleged missile cooperation with South Africa, the plan was put on hold (Gordon 1989, Kaplan 1989). Although the US Department of Defence backed the sell, the IBM officials, who cooperated with the international sanctions against South Africa, feared that Israel would transfer IBM computer technology to South Africa (Kaplan 1989).

Amid the rising criticisms and pressures, a US State Department spokesperson reported that the US had no indication of any military technology being transferred by Israel to South Africa (Ottaway 1989b). This official even refused to comment on those reports which mentioned about the collaboration to develop and test missiles, but he emphasised the importance attached by his country on the MTCR. The issue of re-transferring of US-origin technology meant for the aborted Lavi aircraft, to South Africa was also denied by the official. That said the Bush administration warned of imposing sanctions and such a step would cut several programmes with Israel, if the allegation of missile cooperation with South Africa was to be found true (Ibid 1989a).

More rigorous means were explored to prevent transfers of ballistic missile technology to the Third World. From late 1989, the US started to pressurise Israel to sign the MTCR. This coincided with its efforts to broker negotiations between South Africa and Cuba to bring an end to the conflict with Angola (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 217). The US was more inclined in bringing stability in the African continent by putting an end to the *apartheid* regime. In this endeavour, curbing of military supplies

to South Africa, not only from Israel but also from other countries became the primal concern of the US.

Although the US intervention in Israel's arms exports to South Africa was mainly caused by the changing nature of the former's policies vis-à-vis *apartheid* rule, the issue of unauthorised transfer of American-origin technologies had some relevance. From the late 1980s, there had been reports of Israel retransferring such military technologies without any prior permission from the US. The US took this matter seriously as it did not want any of its military technologies reach the hands of those regimes with which it avoided having a direct contact. Scholars like Duncan Clarke have already highlighted in detail "Israel's unauthorised arms transfers" to various countries, including China and South Africa (Clarke 1995: 89-109).

The US had its reservations of supplying military items and technologies to those countries which were considered as "pariah states" by the international community (Ibid: 89). South Africa was considered one such state which many countries refused to deal openly, including the US. As its national interest, US did not have much problem in the 1970s when Israel's military ties with South Africa gradually picked up, but it started to show discomfiture over such relations when its citizens began to condemn the *apartheid* regime, particularly from the early 1980s. There are a few reasons as to why it vehemently objected to the retransfers of its military-technologies to a third party. According to Clarke:

Israel often retransfers US defence products to state that are potentially hostile to the United States or are blatant violation of human rights. These retransfers have threatened American commercial interests, compromised intelligence, upset regional stability, strained diplomatic relations, and confirmed the US national security bureaucracy's long-standing distrust of Israel technology transfer practices (Ibid: 90).

As all the factors could not be attributed to the US pressure on Israel to stop military ties with South Africa, the issue of violation of human rights appeared to be apt in this case. Even in the case of China, the US imposed arms embargo after the crackdown on pro-democracy protestors at the Tiananmen Square.

The question of Israel's potential challenge to the commercial interests of the US could not be ignored. This aspect was clearly seen at the time of the Lavi project which was aborted before its completion. Although the widely-accepted reason for the

cancellation of such large-scale project was the enormous economic cost associated with its development programme, the likely competition from Israel in the aviation market after the completion of Lavi was also a concern for the US.

The US has strict rules over transfers of military technologies to any recipient countries. One of them is the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) of 1976, under which the US cannot transfer any of its defence items or related service to any country unless that country agrees not to retransfer to a third country without any prior consent from the US government (United States: International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act 1976: 1197-1217). On several occasions, Israel was accused of violating this act by improper transfers of US-made weapons systems and technologies.

According to a report by the General Accounting Office (GAO) in June 1983, most of Israel's exports contained "an import component of about 36 per cent" (General Accounting Office 1983). It mentioned that 35 percent of the total Israeli expertise in electronics field was acquired from the US either through licensed production or technology transfer. Moreover, every weapons production programme conducted by Israel had some US inputs. Despite its attempt to reduce reliance on the US, Israel had to import sensitive technologies to sustain its R&D programmes. Due to this, the US became very cautious about its technologies being transferred to other countries by Israel.

The issues of upgrading and retransfers of US-origin military technologies erupted in Israeli-South African military ties. Apart from the conventional arms exports, Israel reportedly took up the task of upgrading South Africa's aging Mirage jets. This had taken place during the 1980s when the presence of the Cuban troops was on the rise in Angola. It helped South Africa maintain air supremacy and even upgraded Mirage fleet to a more sophisticated fighter jet, Cheetah. The investment involved in this upgrading programme was considered to be a massive one and became a "huge boon for the Israeli defence industry" (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 151). It was able to upgrade South Africa's fighter jet as it already developed its own fighter Kfir jet, which was a modified version of Mirage V jets. With the progression of their ties, two



prototypes of South Africa's Cheetah were sent to Israel in August 1984 for further upgrades (Ibid.).

This was the extent of the cooperation in military aviation sector but it was kept under-wrapped. The secret nature of their ties reached to such a level that when the first two prototypes were returned to South Africa, the South African company Atlas Aircraft presented the upgraded aircrafts to the media and public as its own product (Ibid: 151-52). Israel's involvement in the upgrading programme was played down. However, as military cooperation was under constant international scrutiny, the point of origin of Cheetah was not doubtful to many people. Without any delay, the US Defence Intelligence Agency said indirectly that the Cheetah was the upgraded version of the French-made Mirage III, but it avoided naming Israel as the main contractor (Ibid.).

Even though the US did not create visible problems for Israel for the upgrading of Cheetah, the reports of Kfir being sold to South Africa were viewed with concern. The veto power wielded by the US over Israel's attempts to sell Kfir to a few Latin American countries is highlighted in the previous chapter. As this fighter jet had a US-made engine, Israel needed prior consent from the manufacturer before selling it to any client. This issue received some attention by the media in Israel and an agency wrote that, "IAI and the South Africans found a solution by purchasing French engines that were fitted to the South African version of the Kfirs. The Mirage, which was designed in France and copied by Israel, regained its original engine" (Benn 2013). The same report estimated that during the 1980s, South Africa purchased about "60 Kfir combat planes that were no longer in use by the Israel Air Force" (Ibid.). These aircrafts were upgraded by Israel and they were used by South Africa's air force after renaming it 'Atlas Cheetah'. The entire deal was approximately US \$1.7 billion. Most of the Kfir deals were presented as existing contracts to escape pressure from the US.

Jane Hunter, who criticised Israel's military ties with South Africa and the Latin American countries, was of the view that the *apartheid* regime "could be a direct recipient of US military assistance to Israel. It is a pattern that marks other purported licensing deals as well" (Hunter 1987a: 43). There were indications that South Africa

was a partner in the Lavi fighter jet programme. During the early 1980s, it was believed that South Africa had agreed to help in the development of the Lavi, and the financial assistance was expected to run into “several hundred millions of dollar” (Adams 1984: 120). There are, however, no reports indicating the exact nature of their cooperation and the programme that was terminated by the US in August 1987 has remained one of the most important crises in Israel-US relations. Moreover, as Israel had the intention of exporting such sophisticated fighter jets to the Third World markets, the US had predicted a potential competition to its own exports of F-16 jets. A news report released by *The Washington Post* in 1986 mentioned that Israel projected to sell about 407 Lavi aircrafts to South Africa, Chile, Taiwan and Argentina (Babcock 1986).

Apart from financial assistance to the Lavi project, the engine of the jet was of US-origin and hence, the US was worried over the possible retransfers of such technologies to South Africa. The Lavi debacle happened during late 1980s when Israeli-South African military ties were at their peak despite the sanctions. Around this period, South Africa and China were considered as the “two principle recipients of unauthorised Israeli re-exports of US-origin defence technologies” (Clarke 1995: 102). The South African connection to the Lavi project was highly speculated due to the record of its military ties with Israel. As South Africa’s Cheetah aircraft were upgraded by Israel, many were of the view that both the countries might have been interested in carrying forward the Lavi project after its termination by the US (Gee 2007).

Another reason that raised the suspicion was the report that many Israeli aeronautical engineers and technicians who were seeking employment in South Africa after the cancellation of the Lavi project (JTA 1987d). It was reported that many of the skilled personnel from Israel Aviation Industries were approached by the South African aviation industries with offers for high-paying jobs.

The US-origin military technologies or parts that were allegedly re-exported by Israel to South Africa included aircraft engines, anti-tank missiles, armoured personnel carriers and recoilless rifles (Clarke 1995: 103). A less-discussed military item that was sold to South Africa without the permission of the US was the Shafrir or the

Python-3 missile manufactured by Rafael Armament Development Authority. Python missile was adapted from the US-made AIM-9L Sidewinder missile containing a high degree of US technology (Clarke 1995: 104, Klieman 1985: 82). Export of this missile system raised concern in the US as Israel purchased the technology from the former, and rapidly underwent a process of reverse engineering. The US defence firm Raytheon claimed that the infra-red guidance system which was used in the Saffir missile was based on the Sidewinder (Steinberg 1986: 169).

Thus, the US was concerned not only about technology retransfers but also the capability of Israel to conduct reverse-engineering. Over the period of time, Israel learned how to disassemble US-origin military products so as to study the “design secrets”, and copying them with minor alterations (Clarke 1995: 94-95). The finished items were then sold to its recipients and in the words of Clarke,

Outwardly, these items appear to be indigenous and outside of US controls. In fact, they are unauthorised copies of American originals and should be fully subject to control. Publicly, Israel denies any wrongdoing. Those making the charges are commonly accused of malign intent. Israeli officials argue either that their defence exports contain no US technology or, more commonly, that while some U.S technology may be utilized, it has been transformed so completely, and often improved, that the resulting product is uniquely Israeli (Ibid: 95).

Amid the US objections on alleged retransfers of its military technologies, there were a few Israelis and media people who suggested that, under the Reagan administration, the US gave a tacit approval to Israel to re-export US-origin military items to South Africa (Ibid: 103). This notion was, however, found to be false during an investigation conducted by US Assistant Secretary of Defence Henry Rowen and a few others.

By the end of 1980s, the US pressure on Israel to stop arms exports to South Africa increased. The Bush administration took continuing military relations with the *apartheid* regime seriously and primarily targeted missile systems and was pressuring the Jewish state to comply with the MTCR. Apart from these concerns, the US was worried about the possibilities of certain sensitive nuclear technologies reaching into the hands of the allies of the African National Congress (ANC), namely Cuba and Libya. These countries were quite hostile to the Western countries, and the US, in

particular. This further intensified the pressure of the US on Israel to suspend its arms exports.

By late 1980s, South Africa started to show a sign of its inclination towards a democratic rule by shunning the *apartheid* regime. With its ambitions to shed “pariah status”, South Africa knew well that it had to give up its “covert nuclear weapons programme” (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 220). Under the intense pressure from the US and Britain, South Africa had started the process of dismantling its nuclear weapons programme from November 1989, and initiated the process of accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (Purkitt and Burgess 2005: 182). President F.W. de Klerk began to adopt political reforms to improve South Africa’s relations with the international community. In early 1990, a decision was taken to destroy South Africa’s nuclear deterrent capability and the process of dismantling was completed by early July 1991. Thereafter, on 10 July, South Africa became signatory to the NPT and it concluded a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September 1991 (Villiers *et al.* 1993).

As South Africa agreed to abide by the rules of the international nuclear and energy watchdogs, the attention of the US shifted towards Israel and threatened it to restrict import licenses for its weapons systems, and to prevent its defence firms from competing for US defence contracts, particularly missile systems (Diehl 1991). Finally in early October 1991, under the intense pressure of the US, Israel had agreed to abide by the terms of the MTCR to limit transfers of missile weaponry and technology to other countries, including South Africa and China (Williams 1991b). This was considered one of the biggest achievements of the US in its efforts to curb Israel’s military exports during the early 1990s. As much as military ties were hindered, pressure tactics strained its relations with the US. The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the period where Israel’s military exports remained under the constant scrutiny and surveillance of the US officials. Although Israel lifted its trade embargo against South Africa and renewed full trade in July 1991, that is, before agreeing to follow the terms of the MTCR, the ban on military trade was still in force. This change in the policy came after the US ended its economic sanctions on South Africa.

Israel could not escape the pressures of the Bush administration, and between late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a heavy arms trade between Israel and the US. Apart from this, it was relying on the US for some of the most sophisticated military modernisation programme and hence, needed the assistance of the former, both technologically and economically. The US had also become an increasingly lucrative market for its weapons systems. The importance attached to the US military assistance was evidenced by its willingness to play covert roles in assisting the rebels in a few Central and South American countries, during the 1970s and 1980s. For such roles, Israel was promised with further aid.

It was because of such dependence that the US began to enjoy a higher degree of influence over Israel's arms exports policies. An American analyst observed:

Pentagon was reluctant to let Israel bid on new contracts for space and missile projects unless it signed the technology accord. Israeli defence industries hold about \$1 billion in Pentagon contracts and the government is eager for more to defray the costs of building its own weapons (Ibid.).

Israel preferred to give in to the US pressure than to run the risk of losing both lucrative arms deals and military aid by continuing its military ties with South Africa. In 1991, the Defence Ministry had planned to request the US for increasing the military aid from US\$1.8 billion to US\$2.5 billion and wanted the authorisation to use approximately US\$400 million of the increased amount for investing its own defence industries rather than utilise them to buy US-made military items (Ibid.). These factors had also contributed to Israel's adherence to the MTCR.

It became apparent that South Africa was moving towards a new form of governance that would give more emphasis to civilian cooperation. However, it was not only the dwindling of the *apartheid* regime that became an important factor for the ultimate demise of the military relations, but also "larger geopolitical forces were quickly making it militarily and economically irrelevant" (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 218). Therefore, in the absence of military ties, the entire essence of Israel-South Africa relations waned significantly. The new South Africa no longer followed the policies adopted by the National Party (NP) government, and as a result, the need for arms and ammunitions declined. The ideological affinity that kept both the countries glued to each other dissipated as Nelson Mandela started to look for partnerships with other

countries. In April 1994, when the ANC came to power by abolishing the *apartheid* regime, Israel's military cooperation with South Africa became almost non-existent. Owing to these changes that took place in South Africa, the Israeli government, in July, lifted its seven-year embargo on the sale of arms to South Africa (JTA 1994). Despite this announcement, no major breakthrough happened vis-à-vis arms trade. Finally, the new Defence Minister of South Africa issued a statement on 14 July 1994 which talked of ending the "special relationship with Israel", and he compared "Israel's Palestine policy with the *apartheid* years in South Africa" (Kalley, Jacqueline Audrey *et al.* 1999: 530).

The economic cost of losing the South African defence market was a severe loss to Israel although it started warming up to other clients in Asia, particularly, India and China. The total military trade conducted by Israel and South Africa was estimated to be more than US\$10 billion over the course of two decades (Polakow-Suransky 2011: 231). This is a significant figure considering the fact that both the countries navigated their military ties amid the sanctions, and the constant vigilance of the US.

## Conclusion

It is evident that the US factor played a major role in bringing an end to Israel-China and Israel-South Africa military relations. The predictions of a few scholars such as Reiser (1989) and Klieman (1985) regarding the veto power of the US over Israel's arms exports were right, both in Chinese and South African cases. The US successfully deployed its foreign policy interest vis-à-vis Israel's ties with China and South Africa. The similarity is that Israel's military ties with both the countries were promoted by the US during the 1970s and the early 1980s to fight the Soviet expansionist policies in West Asia and Africa. This took a drastic turn when the Cold War was nearing its end. It no longer saw China as a counterweight to the Soviet influence and started to perceive it as a potential threat. Similar was the case with South Africa. With the easing of tensions between South Africa and the Cuban troops in Angola, the US felt the need to prevent influx of arsenals to the *apartheid* regime. This coalesced with the efforts of the US and the international community to bring down the *apartheid* rule. Taking advantage of such political developments, the US used its tactics of threatening Israel with the cancellation of military aid for its arms sales to South Africa despite sanctions.

China and South Africa have been two important cases where the US successfully scuttled Israel's arms exports. Israel lost these lucrative defence markets one after another as the US used its pressure tactics of withholding military aid. In both the cases, their bilateral relations were signified by the level of military cooperation with Israel. Once this aspect of their ties declined, the relations did not see any enhancement and at the same time, Israel's image as a reliable arms supplier was dented. The snapping of military ties with China and South Africa incurred heavy losses to Israel's military industries as well.

Owing to its dependence on the US for economic, political and military supports, Israel's ability to conduct an independent arms export policy would continue to remain limited. To avoid confrontations, both these countries should clearly define their own strategic interests. As Arens rightly said after the Patriot controversy,

Israel must show respect for U.S strategic concerns and the US should understand Israel's vital need for a viable advanced defence industry that cannot exist without sales outside Israel. The matter has been neglected for too long (Arens 2005).

Therefore, the pressure of third party interference hindered Israel's military relations with China and South Africa.

The significance of arms sales diplomacy that promoted Israel's ties with both the countries was belittled by the US. In the absence of military cooperation, Israel's ties with China and South Africa remained low-profile. From these experiences, Israel has become cognisant of the fact that any future arms contracts or sales would have to be carried out only after a close consultation with the US. This appears to be an infringement on its right to conduct its independent arms sales policies but, at the same time, it would not like to get entangled in another controversy which could jeopardise its relations with the US. To avoid confrontations, it would have to listen to the US on matters related to arms exports and its dependence on US military technology and aid will continue to provide the US leverage on some of Israel's arms exports. This will largely depend on the types of weapons systems to be sold, profile of the buyer country, US relations with that country, and above all, the nature of relationship between the Israeli and the US governments.

# Chapter Seven

## Conclusions

**A**rms sales occupy an important place in Israel's foreign policy pursuits. This is a phenomenon which could be witnessed a few years after its establishment in May 1948. The need of having a robust defence industrial unit was felt even before the state was established when Jewish forces did not have any reliable arms suppliers unlike the Arabs who equipped themselves with arms originated from Europe. Such deficiency had resulted into the production of rudimentary weapons systems, particularly arms and ammunitions, in agricultural settlements and semi-urban areas. After its establishment, Israel began to face serious security threats from the hostile neighbouring countries and order to overcome these challenges, its leaders gave a major emphasis on establishing defence industries.

Initially, Israel did not have the privilege of choosing arms suppliers and had to import a few items from Czechoslovakia until 1951. This was further complicated by its policy of "non-identification" as a response to the emerging Cold War. By refraining from aligning with either of the power blocs—the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)—the window of opportunity for security and military assistance also narrowed. Especially, the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950 diminished Israel's chances to import arms from the West, particularly the US.

Although Israel ended its neutrality by siding with the West during the Korean Crisis of June 1950, the US did not alter its arms transfer policies. The regional and strategic interest vis-à-vis the Cold War prevented the US from acceding to Israel's request for arms. Contrary to these, the Arab neighbours continued to receive arms not only from the Soviet bloc but also from the signatories of the Tripartite Declaration. This became a turning point and forced the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to intensify the process of establishing defence industries to overcome the immediate military-security challenges. Along with the fundamental objectives to meet the growing domestic demands of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and to offset the trade



imbalances, arms were exported from the late 1960s and early 1970s for commercial and political purposes.

Political isolation and exclusion from regional groupings have been a major problem for Israel since the 1950s. Its non-acceptance was evident during the Baghdad Pact and the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, both occurred in 1955. These exclusions cost a heavy political and security price and estranged Israel's relations with the Third World countries. Further condemnations, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, intensified after 1967. The imposition of an arms embargo by France, when the June War broke out, severely hampered Israel's import of arms, particularly fighter jet. This episode reinforced its sense of vulnerability of not having a dependable source for arms during a crisis situation. The oil-rich Arab countries began to lure the African countries with economic packages, which had resulted up to 30 Sub-Saharan nations severing diplomatic ties with Israel following the October War and the Oil Crisis. Thereafter, the United Nations General Assembly resolution of November 1975, which equated Zionism with racism, tarnished Israel's image internationally. As a result of these systematic boycotts, its ability to win supports of from various countries was significantly deprived.

Owing to these security and political challenges, arms exports became an important component of the Israeli foreign policy. Unlike the Arab countries, Israel did not have natural resources such as oil but could offer military items manufactured by its defence industries. The military modernisation programmes during the 1970s in different countries (including China and South Africa) became a timely phenomenon as they coincided with the rising technological advancements achieved by Israel's armament industries, mainly in the field of aviation, missile systems, naval equipments, electronic warfare systems, and various subsystems. This was an area where Israel did not hesitate to provide assistance and exported military items to any client without pre-conditions or demands. Different patterns of arms trade, including exports, upgrading of obsolete items, military training, intelligence and information sharing cooperation, joint collaboration and counterterrorism cooperation have become the salient features of its military cooperation. Given the limited political and economic clouts, Israel's foreign relations were promoted with the help of arms

exports. The deployment of this tool worked satisfactorily in both the case studies taken up for this research.

The normalisation of Sino-Israeli relations in January 1992 was one of the best examples to indicate the linkages between arms sales and foreign policy pursuits, although the breakthrough happened after four decades after Israel's recognition of the People's Republic of China. The desire to upgrade their ties to ambassadorial level was stymied by a few international factors and the Korean War and the Bandung Conference were the earliest obstacles to their endeavours. The influence of the external player—the US—in Israel's foreign policy pursuits began to be noticed during this war. The exploration of opportunities to streamline ties through economic activities yielded no desirable result. Amidst the deadlock during the mid-1950s, China moved closer to Egypt and marred the prospects for the Sino-Israeli reconciliation. Its support for the Arabs and Palestinians grew in the mid-1960s and therefore, the relations with Israel were unfriendly and remained frosty during most of the 1960s and 1970s.

From mid-1970s, developments in the international affairs and gradual changes within China brought prospects for improvements. This included the end of the Cultural Revolution, emerging rift between China and the Soviet Union, and Israel's endorsement for the former's entry into the UN in 1971. This did not lead to an immediate political breakthrough although China's posture began to be positive. The demands from its leaders that Israel should withdraw from all the occupied territories and restore the self-determination rights of the Palestinians prevented from making further politico-diplomatic headway. Meanwhile, the emergence of Deng Xiaoping after the demise of Mao Zedong in September 1976 led to the opening of China's economy to the outside world.

The inclusion of military modernisation in Premier Chou En-Lai's "four modernisations" programmes gave an opportunity to Israel to cater to China's needs for military technologies. After losing the Soviet Union as its arms supplier, China began to give importance towards the establishment of a self-reliant defence industry and as a result, encouraged indigenisation programmes. The Western defence markets were not available to China due to which the latter looked for cheaper arms and

alternative import sources. From 1975, gradual contacts between Chinese and Israeli officials belonging to defence and foreign ministries developed. By then, Israel achieved a considerable degree of achievement in designing and developing a host of weapon systems and this expertise caught the attention of the Chinese leaderships. The convergence of interests between the two countries led to the growth of interactions on military spheres. Thereafter, commercial and civilian contacts sped up during the mid-1980s mostly through back-channels diplomacy. Israel reopening its Consulate in Hong Kong in 1985 was viewed as a step to push for a political presence in mainland China through economic activities.

The imposition of the US-led sanctions and arms embargo on China following the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown became a turning point in the Sino-Israeli relations. The international response gave an opportunity to Israel to meet the immediate military needs. An intensive military contact, including arms trade, started after this incident. In addition to this gradual rapprochement, China's interest to take part in resolving international conflicts, mainly in the Third World countries, led to the reorientation of its policies towards Israel. The changing international politics following the end of the Cold War and efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict helped in bringing these two countries closer. The January 1992 diplomatic breakthrough, to a large extent, was facilitated by Israel's readiness to share its military technologies when China was in dire needs. This was possible only when these two countries established back-channel links on matters related to defence. Before this, they had difficulties in finding a common ground to overcome their differences. Israel's arms diplomacy yielded a significant success in its China policy. Therefore, the hypothesis— *Military relations facilitated political relations between Israel and China*—is validated.

The importance of arms exports was visible in Israel's relations with South Africa during the *apartheid* regime. Even in this case, it was the convergence of interests which sustained the relations till the African National Congress (ANC) was democratically elected in 1994. As in the case of China, the military cooperation was conducted in utmost secrecy. The early phase of Israeli-South African ties was not a smooth period as many of the Jewish leaders were more sympathetic to the Sub-Saharan African countries. This was mainly the reason why Israel gave immense

importance towards building relations with these post-Colonial states. Apart from technical and healthcare assistance, military cooperation was one of the mainstays of its relations with countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zaire and Ghana and a distinct pattern of arms trade could be seen in Israel's relations with these countries.

It was only when the Israeli-African relations deteriorated following the June War that a process of warming between Israel and South Africa started. The increasing political isolation and security challenges emerging out of their hostile neighbours led to their strengthening of the military ties.

International pressure against the *apartheid* regime increased and the United Nations Security Council imposed arms embargo in November 1977. This did not affect South Africa not only politically but also impacted on its defence indigenisation programmes. Similarly, China faced sanctions following the Tiananmen incident of 1989 and curbed its source for military hardware and technologies. In the wake of this, rising security demands, growing political isolation and military modernisation programmes were some of the important factors that facilitated Israel's military relations with these two countries.

The military cooperation with the *apartheid* regime was more extensive than that with China. This was particularly due to similar challenges faced by Israel and South Africa during the 1960s. Both of them began with defence indigenisation programmes to reduce their dependence on foreign-origin arms. Israel looked for strategic raw materials and a market for its products while South Africa looked for sources of military hardware and technology. Such convergences eased the process of cooperation. As China faced arms embargo in 1989 after the Tiananmen incident, South Africa was imposed with similar arms embargo by the UN in 1963 and 1977. Israel could manoeuvre through the sanctions and embargoes, and continued to forge military ties with both these countries. From the late 1980s, Israel's ties with South Africa were under scrutiny due to the rising international pressure against the *apartheid* regime. The efforts of the US to halt Israel's military exports to Pretoria intensified, and when the new democratic government came, the relations began to dwindle significantly. Once the salience of military cooperation was discarded by the policies of the ANC, Israel's arms sales diplomacy became insignificant. As a result,

the hypothesis that *Arms sales were critical for Israel's political relations with South Africa* has been proved.

Arms sales began to take a central position in the Israeli foreign policy from the 1970s. This was the period when the US started to provide significant military aid and weapons systems which were unavailable to Israel. Although it refused to sell arms throughout the 1950s, the US altered its policies from the 1960s due to the speedy penetration of the Soviet Union to West Asia and the subsequent military supplies to countries such as Egypt and Syria. With a motive to preserve its regional and strategic interests, the US changed its arms transfer policies and agreed to supply Hawk missiles to Israel in 1962. The concern of the US over the possibility of Israel using nuclear deterrence in the advent of a war with the Arab states was also an important consideration. Thereafter, both the countries signed a few major arms deals which fulfilled Israel's need for weapons systems and technology.

The emergence of the US as the principle supplier of arms, financial and technological assistance after the October War began resulting to it gain leverage over Israel's arms export activities at later stages. From the mid-1970s, the relationship was elevated from that of arm suppliers to joint collaborations and technology transfer. Under such circumstances, prior permission from the US became necessary for third-party transfers. This was one of the reasons why certain arms sales by Israel were vetoed by the US. Depending on its strategic interests, the US promoted Israel's arms transfers to countries in Latin America (during the 1970s), China and South Africa (during late 1970s and early 1980s), as a part of its Soviet containment policy. This changed towards the end of the Cold War, and the US began to apply pressure tactics to halt arm transfers.

Arms sales which promoted Israel's relations with China became a major irritant factor after their normalisation. As China was perceived as a potential threat to the American interest in the Asia-Pacific region, the US no longer viewed Beijing's military ties with Israel on a good light from early 1990s. On a similar note, the rising home-grown as well as international pressure against the *apartheid* regime from mid-1980s made the US apply pressure on Israel to halt its military ties with Pretoria. The US factor in Israel's military ties with China and South Africa was that of an

advocacy as well as an obstacle. Israel's inability to escape from the pressure tactics of its ally reduced its credibility as a reliable arms supplier. The significance of arms sales which promoted the ties was lost due to the third-party interference. Some of the defence technologies blocked by the US for export to these two countries mostly related to fighter jet, missile and anti-missile systems and airborne warning systems. Strategic interest during the Cold War, issue of illegal re-transfers of American-origin components, competition factors, the nature of the arms clients and the US foreign policy were some of the prominent contributing factors over Israel's arms exports policies. The hypothesis—*Israel's dependence on the United States for military and economic assistance restrains its arms export policies*—is validated.

In the absence of arms trade, Israel's relations with China and South Africa were not as robust as the earlier periods when they had clandestine military cooperation. Attempts were made by the Israeli and Chinese leaders to upgrade their bilateral ties after normalisation but the intervention made by the US led to the decline and eventually terminated arms exports. Likewise, the Israeli-South African relations after 1994 plunged drastically with the ending of military cooperation, which otherwise was a pivotal driver of the ties.

Israel's military ties with China and South Africa signified the extent to which arms sales was used as a diplomatic tool and promoted economic and political relations. It was also in these cases where the ambivalent role of the US was most prominent, even leading to the scuttling of some arms deals. As long as Israel depends on its ally for crucial military technology for some of its weapons systems and financial aid for research and development (R&D) programmes, its ability to conduct a hassle free arms trade will remain difficult. In addition to these factors, the equation of relations between the two countries under different governments, profile of arms clients and types of military items to be exported will likely regulate Israel's arms export policies. Notwithstanding the influence of the US, arms exports will continue to remain as an important instrument of foreign policy for Israel. Through this activity it will continue to maintain its defence R&D programmes to preserve quantitative and qualitative superiority over its adversaries. At the same time, Israel needs to strengthen its political relations with different countries as arms sales alone cannot dictate the strength of the bilateral ties.

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