

ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA, 1990-2006

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA, 1990-2006" submitted by me for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

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To

*My Revered Babujee
Who has made me what I am*

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPSU	The Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DOP	Declaration Of Principles
EROS	Earth Remote Observation System
EU	The European Union
FSR	Former Soviet Republic
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
MTCR	The Missile Technology Control Regime
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
UN	The United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	The United States
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
VLCC	Very Large Crude Carriers

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Chapter I

Introduction

In the early 1990s, world entered a period of continuous and drastic changes and was transforming from bipolar to multi-polar international system or in the words of Samuel P. Huntington, to a Uni-multipolar system.¹ In this complicated and volatile post-Cold War world, all major countries started re-examining and adjusting their bilateral and multilateral relations in accordance with their national interest. This transformation reinforced that nations do not have eternal friends and perpetual enemies but only permanent national interest. Israel and Russia are no exception to this trend. Both have adopted a new approach to their bilateral relations and have achieved considerable success in their diplomatic, strategic and economic ties.

Israel and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) re-established diplomatic relations in October 1991, shortly before the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Israel's perception about Russia started changing after the collapse of Soviet Union. Moving away from its traditional misgivings, Israel began perceiving Russia as strategically important player and sought to use the Russia's differences with Syria and Iran which are seen as its most dangerous adversaries. Israel wanted Russia to use its influence vis-à-vis the opponents of the peace process and to convince them that there was no other option but negotiations. Israel perceives Russia as constructive player in the UN Security Council, Arab-Israeli peace process, and emerging global player within the context of energy security. It also perceives Russia as partner in the counterterrorism mechanism

Historically, soon after its establishment on 14 May 1948 Israel secured recognition from almost all major players including the USSR. For a brief period (1948-51) it pursued a policy of 'non-identification' and maintained good relations with the USSR.² But

¹Samuel Huntington has proposed that changes in post-Cold War international politics reflects a uni-multipolar system one superpower and several major powers, for details see, Samuel Huntington (1999), "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Policy*, 78 (2): 35-49, March/April.

² For details see, Klieman S. Aaron (1990), *Israel & The World After 40 Years*, New York: Pergamon-Brassery's International Defense Publishers, Inc. pp 185-206, Cohen J. Michael (2007), "From Cold to Hot War: Allied Strategic and Military Interests in Middle East after the Second World War", *Middle Eastern Studies* 43 (5): 739-741.

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gradually Israel sided with the United States. It was fighting for its survival in the hostile environment as the USSR began backing the Arab countries, especially socialist rulers such as President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt. Almost in the entire Cold War period Israel and Soviet relations was hostile because of Soviet strategic, financial, and diplomatic support to Arabs. In every war that Israel fought with the Arab states, (1956, 1967 and 1973) Soviet weapons were used against Israel. At the same time, due to political calculations Israel was always keen to establish links with the USSR. First, it wanted to create differences between the USSR and its Arab adversaries but more importantly it sought to open the door to Jewish immigration from the USSR and other countries of the Eastern Europe.

Since 1989, almost one million Jews from the former Soviet Union have immigrated to Israel, creating a natural economic bridge between the two. This mass immigration of Russian Jews became an important and sometimes decisive factor in Israeli electoral politics. Two immigrant based-parties (*Israel B'Aliya* and *Yisrael Beitenu*) have occupied a dominant position in the Israeli politics. At the same time the trade between the two countries has doubled and currently amounts to close to \$1.5 billion in direct trade, and over a billion in energy deals. Israelis and Russians are working together in sectors spanning heavy industry, aviation, energy, and medicine. Although the Israeli government does not publicize its energy imports, it worries that oil-rich Gulf States could act to undermine its energy supplies. One senior diplomat revealed that 88 percent of Israel's crude oil comes from the former Soviet Union. This ensures Israel with sour (high sulphur) oil at reduced market prices.³ Moreover Israel's dependence on Russian energy is increasing and in June 2004 Israel promised to increase the share of Russian gas in its energy balance from one percent to 25 percent by 2025.⁴

The most visible area of cooperation between Israel and Russia has been in counterterrorism. Israel was one of the first countries to support Russia after the Beslan tragedy in 2004 where almost 300 people, mostly children, were killed in a hostage

³For details see, Ilya Bourtnan (2006), "Putin and Russia's Middle Eastern Policy", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 10 (2):1-15, June.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 2.

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standoff with Chechen rebels.⁵ Senior level talks have focused on three areas: training, border security and arms. On larger political issues Israel, however, continued to be unhappy with the Russia's support for Iran's nuclear programme. There are concerns over Russian arms sales to Syria, its stand vis-à-vis Hamas and growing incidents of anti-Semitism in Russia.

For Israel, the most serious threat to the bilateral relations come from Russia's continued construction of a nuclear reactor in Iran, which most Israelis feel a threat their country's existence. It is suspicious about Russian intentions and views the July 2002 deal for the construction of six nuclear reactors as a threat to its national security. Additionally, Israel has been worried about the Russian-Syrian strategic cooperation and their opposition to American hegemony in the West Asia. There is a history of diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation between the two countries dating back to the Soviet period. There are apprehensions that Russian weapons supplied to Syria could fall into the hands of militant groups such as the Hezbollah. Specifically disturbing element was for Israel about Russia's continued refusal to consider Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations but on the contrary bestowing political legitimacy and support.

Review of the Literature:

There are several arguments on the various aspects of the Israel-Russia relations. On the issue of the improvement of the Israel-Russia relations there is a consensus among experts. Regarding specifics such as Syria, Iran factor and the US, they have different views. Ilya Bourman (2006) argued that President Vladimir Putin (2005) was pursuing a two track policy towards the West Asia. At one level he was allowing Russia to develop friendly ties with Israel while simultaneously nurturing alternative, sometimes competing, and interest with Arab countries. With the result Russia has successfully signed diplomatic, military, and energy deals and developed ties with both Israel and its Arab neighbours without significantly alienating one or the other. Israel and Russia have a joint mechanism for the counterterrorism. Bourman suspected the Russian intention on

⁵Ibid, p-3.

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the issues like unchecked arms trade and its dealings with the Syria and Iran. For Bourtman stated that no amount of counter-terrorism cooperation or trade links would be able to save Israeli-Russia relations if Russia remains complicit in Iran's nuclear aspirations.

On the question of the US factor in the Israel-Russia relations, Talal Nizameddin (1999) maintained said that Israel cannot become a strategic partner of Russia because of its strong defence and security ties with the US. John Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt (2006), agreed with this view and argued that Israeli as well as the US foreign policies have the enormous influence by the Israeli lobby in the US. That is why Israel has difficulties to make any independent relations with the Russia. But Shai Feldman (1998) felt that Israel cannot ignore Russian strategic involvement in the West Asian region.

During the past decade, developments within Russia propelled two most important changes in Israel's strategic standing: large amount of immigration of Jews, and the current phase of the peace process. The Russian immigration, possibly the most highly skilled since Israel was established, has already contributed to making the Israeli economy more robust than ever (Bourtman, 2006). Politically the Russian vote undoubtedly played a crucial role during recent Knesset elections. There is an enormously diversity in the support of the Russian immigrant voters for various political parties. Their votes were critical for the victory of Ariel Sharon in direct election of the Prime Minister in February 2001. In 2003, three leading Russian parties jointly fought the elections and thereby increased their political leverage (Sandler, 2003). In 2006 *Knesset* election *Yisrael Beitenu* got 12 Knesset seats and became the fourth largest faction in the 120-member parliament. This bestowed the party a powerful bargaining capacity in the ruling coalition (*The Current Digest of Post Soviet Press*, CDPSP, 2006c).

At one time, *Yisrael B'Aliya* which was represented in three successive parliaments raised the possibility that it might be another *Shas*, an ethnic party enjoying a stable support base among the immigrant community. This is due not only to the number of *Knesset* seats it controlled, but because it was more flexible than other possible coalition partners

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on the issues- the disposition of the territories, role of religion in public life, economy and security (Shamir, 2002). The party however, could not live up to such expectations and merged with the Likud following the 2003 elections. *Yisrael Beiteinu* however, is more organized and has shown signs of becoming the voice of the Russian immigrants in Israel.

Shai Feldman (1998) argued that as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Israel's regional opponents have lost their Soviet strategic umbrella. Within the Arab world, this tilted the balance away from the forces opposing the Arab-Israel peace process. Mark N Katz (2006), argued that under Putin, Russia has not only declined to adopt Western Europe's increasingly shrill anti-Israeli posture, but in many ways he was actually tilted in Israeli favour, at least with respect to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Regarding military groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, Bourman stated that because of Russia's non-recognition of Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organization, the bilateral relations have become rather cool. In Israel, Russian invitation for the Hamas leaders in the early 2006 was seen as a 'stab in the back'. Israel is accusing Russia of applying double standards and it was commented that Israeli-Russian relations were on the brink of their worst crisis in many years (CDPSP, 2006a). But at the same time on the counterterrorism Bourman said that they have improved their relations and made a joint mechanism against the emerging new trends of the terrorism. The logic was that both countries shared the common threat perceptions. Katz (2005) argued that Russia has dual policy towards the terrorist; one side it is with Israel on the Chechnya crisis and another side it gives assistance to the Iran and Syria which is the strong ally of Hezbollah. Robert Freedman (2005) has doubted the Russian role and argued that Russia plays more than a niche role in the West Asia, it lacks the well-defined, long-term strategy necessary to be considered a real great power.

Okasan Antonenko (2001) mainly discussed about the strategic relations of Israel and Russia and argued that the Israel-Russian military-technical cooperation is clearly mutually beneficial and strategically important for the both defence industries. For Israel,

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this cooperation is likely to bring significant profits in expansion of its exports to both traditional and new markets. The Israel-Russia military cooperation represents a more effective alternative to sanctions driven US policies. As long as Russia sees economic benefits from alternative military cooperation programmes, it is more likely to exercise restraint in its military. Finally, he expressed doubts about Israel being a reliable strategic partner for future upgrades because US influence over Israel which could sabotage future contracts.

On the Syrian and Iranian factors Katz (2005), argued that despite closer ties with Israel, the Russian government remains the greatest facilitator for Iranian nuclear ambitions. Despite its close ties to Syria and Iraq in the past, he argues that Israel-Russia relation has undergone a steady sift. Russia has pursued an 'even-handed' policy toward Israel on the one hand and with radical regimes in Iraq, Iran and Syria on the other. Israel perceives profound role for Russia in the peace process especially because Russia is the only member of Quartet which has the good relations of the both sides of the Arab-Israel conflict (CDPSP, 2006a). Russia also seeks an influence with Hamas and maintains that only a dialogue with Palestine's ruling party could break the deadlock. Russia at the same time, maintains that Hamas should renounce terror and recognize Israel's right to exist, as well as accept the Israel-Palestine agreements reached in the past (CDPSP, 2007a). But while emphasizing the similarities in Russian and US approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian, Russia has distanced itself from the Bush administration's policy towards Syria (Katz, 2005).

Definition, Rationale and Scope of the Study:

This research study examines the Israel-Russia relations in the context of regional as well as international opportunities and constraints after the end of Cold War and disintegration of Soviet Union till the 2005. This study has importance in the sense that it would give a systematic analysis in both countries which is lacking in the most of the previous studies. This study also has relevancy because it analyzes the implication of the complexities in terms of the bilateral as well as multilateral relations on the Israel-Russia relations.

Research Questions:

1. What is the nature of Israel-Russia relations?
2. How far Immigration played role in Israel-Russia relations?
3. How far external factors have (Syria, Iran and U.S.) have affected the Israel-Russia relations?
4. What role can Russia play in Arab-Israel peace process?

Hypotheses:

1. Increased immigration of Jews from Russia has improved the Israel-Russia relations.
2. Israel's relation with Russia has undermined the Strategic choices of Syria and Iran.
3. Israel-Russia relations have given more leverage to Israel in Arab-Israel peace process.

Methodology:

The proposed study is descriptive and historical. Review of data collected from the secondary sources is used for the research. Apart from the available secondary sources like books, periodicals, journals, newspapers etc, the official report, and document are extensively used in this research work. The agreements signed between the two countries as well as United Nations resolutions and documents over Palestine are used examined. Hence the technique of the study will be deductive.

The second chapter on "The Political and Economic aspects" mainly discuss the political and economic ties between the two. It analyzed Israel and Russia relations from historical perspective and gives a general view of the linkages between Marxism and Zionism in general and the Cold War developments in particular. It also deals with causes for the Soviet support to the establishment of Israel and the major factors which led to

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subsequent confrontation between the two. The reasons which created the friendly environment after the Cold War are taken into account. The main agreement between both on various issues have been discussed broadly, like the cooperation in the field of Agriculture, science and technology, maritime, transports, health, telecommunications and energy etc. The economic and trade relation are the main focused of this chapter. On the political side, the dominating roles of the Russian immigrant's parties (specially, *Yisrael Ba'Aliya, and Yisrael Beiteinu*) in Israel and strategic cooperation (particularly in the field of combating terrorism) are also examined elaborately.

The third chapter on "Implication of the External Actors," examines the influence of the external actors on the Israel-Russia relations. Iran, Syria, Hamas and the US had been identified as the external actors. The different considerations of Israel and Russia towards the every external actor are taken into account (such as national security and economic security). Russia's arms deal with Iran and Syria are broadly analyzed. Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran and its implications on the Israel's national security are discussed. It also deals with Russia's special relation with Hamas (non-recognition of terrorist organization) and the Israel's (and US) perception about Hamas as the terrorist organization. The implications of the US influence in the Israeli politics and the West Asian region as whole and its confronting position with the Russia regarding issues (like Iran, Syria and Hamas) are analyzed.

The fourth chapter fourth on "Russia's Role in Arab-Israel Peace Process" examines the Russia's role the Arab-Israel peace process within the context of improving relation between Israel and Russia. The general Soviet policy towards the Palestine question before and after the establishment Israel is discussed. The USSR's policies in the United Nations regarding the Palestinian cause are also taken into account (particularly, the resolutions 181, 194 and 242) where the USSR had a decisive role. This chapter also examines how Arab-Israel conflict became the battle ground of the super powers confrontation in the context of Cold War. The USSR supported Arab countries and the US supported Israel. The reasons for shifts in Russia policy towards the Israel (and also the US) regarding the Arab-Israel peace process in the first half of 1990s are discussed in

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the context of end of Cold War. The Russian policies as member of Quartet and independent are examined separately within the context of Arab-Israel peace process.

The final chapter summarizes the thesis with the verification of the hypotheses.

Chapter II

Political and Economic Aspects of Israel-Russia Relations

Traditional Russian attitude towards Jews and Communist ideology were a serious obstacle to Israel's relation with erstwhile USSR. In approaching the Soviet Union, Israel began with one major limitation: the Zionist idea amused Soviet sensitivities to an extent that outside observers would find it impossible to comprehend. Yet, on doctrinal grounds, Zionism and Marxism have always been antithetical, with Bolshevik ideologues realizing the appeal of Zionism for the Jewish proletariat on the basis of ethnic, religious, and national consciousness rather than Communist internationalism that became official policy of the Soviet Union (Klieman, 1990: 187).

At the same time, however, it must be noted that it was the anti-Semitic policy of the Russian government that was one of the main causes for the development of the Zionist movement and the beginning of Jewish immigration to Palestine (or *aliya*) that began in 1882, mainly from Eastern Ukraine (Tessler, 1994:23-24). According to Theodor Herzl, the most prominent founder of the Zionist movement in August 1903, the Russian Minister of Interior, Vyacheslav Plehve told him: "because of the problems created by the poor Jewish population in the Russian Empire, the creation of an independent Jewish state, capable of absorbing several million Jews, would suit us best of all" (Raphael, 1960: 1535). On the issue of the establishment of a Jewish homeland, Lenin the founder of Soviet Union was completely hostile. He denounced all forms and currents of Zionism, including the socialist elements in the movement. Lenin called the Zionist ideals "fairy tales". In his view, "the Jews were not a nation and the solution of the Jew question could be found in the voluntary assimilation of the Jews among the nations where they lived" (Polsky, 1994: 19).

However, the shift in the Soviet attitude, from antagonism towards Zionism to effusive support, was often associated with the German attack during the World War II. It was argued that the ties established by the Soviets with Jewry and the *Yishuv* (Jewish community in Palestine) reflected in the first place the need to enlist the support of the World Jewish community to the Soviet war effort. The war, it is suggested, provided the

USSR with new opportunities to “find a way to extensive circles in the Western world in order to gain maximum support for its struggle against Nazi Germany” (Grodetsky, 2003: 4).

Furthermore, the role of the Soviet in the creation of an independent state of Israel can not be underestimated. When Zionist leader and future president Chaim Weizmann opened the channel of communication with the Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maiskii in London, it was quit positive. In their first meeting at the end of January 1941, Weizmann alerted Maiskii, to the possibilities that would open up for the USSR in the region whereby they could cooperate with the Jewish Agency in Palestine. Weizmann’s scheme envisaged the rescue of central European Jewry, with Soviet help, to be followed by a “move of a million Arabs who were in Palestine to Iraq, and [the settlement of] four or five million Jews from Poland and other countries on the land where theses Arabs were” (Grodetsky, 2003: 5-6).

Weizmann preserved in his efforts. He continued to address long letters to Maiskii and even extended his effort to Washington, where he met Maksim Litvinov, the Soviet Ambassador and former Commissar for Foreign Affairs. On those occasions, Weizmann drew up “three of the most fundamental aspects of the Soviet social philosophy” which he believed to be embodied in the Zionist “national system” in Palestine: economic structure based on collective welfare rather than on individual gain, planned economy and the fact that “there was majority of adherents of Zionism have close personal and family relations with the USSR, and a peculiar interest in, and special sympathy with, its people” (Grodetsky, 2003: 8). Finally, before leaving London, Maiskii was cautiously informed to Weizmann that “the Soviet would support them” on the issue of establishment of independent state of Israel. (Grodetsky 2003: 9).

On his way home, Maiskii spent three days in Palestine as a guest of the British Mandatory Administration. It gave him a unique opportunity to gain first-hand impression of the viability of the Zionist movement in Palestine and the capacity of the country to absorb a considerable Jewish immigration. His meeting with Ben-Gurion and other leaders of the *Yishuv* in Ma’aleh ha-Hamishah and Kiryat Anavim *Kibbutzim* near

Jerusalem left a tremendous impression on him. When Maiskii returned to the USSR, he compiled a long report for Joseph Stalin which apparently opted for support of a Jewish state. Golda Meir, a prominent leader of the *Yishuv* and later Foreign Minister, recognized the significance of the visit. Her impression was that Maiskii was determined “to know whether it was possible to do something in this country, so that when the time came, when they would have to express an opinion on the Jewish problem and on Palestine, he would have first-hand knowledge” (Grodetsky 2003: 9-10).

These developments gave the alternative picture of the situation of Palestine. On 28 April 1947 the day the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly was convened, Andrei Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the USSR, received a new directive that reversed the position regarding Palestine. He was suddenly asked to change the line and emphasize the “unparalleled disaster and suffering” inflicted on the Jewish people during the World War (Grodetsky 2003: 15). Soon after the proclamation the Israel as an independent state, the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett (later Shertok) dispatched a telegram to Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov asking official recognition to the Provisional Government of the State of Israel (Freundlich, 2003:39). On 18 May 1948, Molotov notified Israel about the USSR’s decision to grant *de jure* recognition. He asserted: “Soviet Government hopes that the establishment of the sovereign independent state by the Jewish people will serve to strengthen peace and security in Palestine and the Near East, and it expresses its faith in the development of friendly relations between the USSR and the State of Israel” (Pinkus, 2005: 96).

The USSR was the first power to extend *de jure* recognition to the state of Israel. Although the US preceded the USSR in endorsing the Jewish State, it had only accorded *de facto* recognition.¹ However, one can argue that this was a turning point in the Soviet policy towards Israel because of the two strategic and ideological considerations. Strategic considerations focused upon Soviet desire to end Britain’s role and influence from West Asia. Other was ideological consideration whereby the Soviet Union viewed the emerging state of Israel as potentially a true “people’s democracy”. As such, it

¹ The other two Western powers, France and Britain granted *de facto* recognition to Israel in January 1949. *De Jure* recognition was delayed until May 1949 and April 1950 respectively.

deserved support in the competition that was taking place between the “socialist and imperialist systems” (Kazan, 2004).

This friendly attitude however did not last and both sides were responsible for the worsening of relations. Some of the actions taken by Israel in the period between May 1948 and February 1953 impacted negatively upon its relations with the USSR. These included: requests for loans and economic aid from the United States and voting with the West at the United Nations, notably on Korea in 1950 and on the US Mutual Security Act in 1951. An anti-Soviet tone in the Israeli press may also have caused damage. The request for first American loan was placed as early as in June 1948, when Soviet support for Israel was at its peak, although the United States only gave its response in January 1949. The Soviet Union made frequent inquiries regarding American economic aid to Israel especially on the political conditions attached to it. Israel sought at first to balance its dependence on American aid with requests for loans from the USSR, yet these were never forthcoming. By 1952, American economic aid was supplemented by military assistance, and Soviet legation Counsellor in Israel Aleksandr Abramov reported to his Government on the content of the debate at the Israeli Knesset Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee following the agreement between Israel and the US (Roi, 2003: 22). On the issue of US Mutual Security Act appropriations for anti-soviet activity, Andrei Vyshinskii, head of Soviet delegation to the UN General Assembly said to Sharett, head of Israeli delegation to the UN General Assembly, that “he (Sharett) knew that Israel depended economically on the US and understood its situation perfectly, but could we (USSR) not at least have abstained” (Freundlich, 2003: 49).

Other factors, which worsened the relationship, were not directly connected with Israel but rather, emanated from the outbreak of the Cold War. The USSR’s relations with the Western powers or with the Arab states were influenced by Soviet and Arab relations with the West. The USSR viewed itself as the champion workers’ of the world and the centre for the global fight against capitalism and imperialism. It regarded Israel as an ally of the forces that it was fighting. The Soviet expansionist ideology could not sit back and watch an expansionist Israeli ideology (Epstein, 2007:181). The intensification of anti-Semitism in the USSR - this period, known as the “Black Years” of Soviet Jewry

witnessed the “anticosmopolitan campaign” and the Doctors’ Plot.² Thus the identification of Soviet Jewry with the Israel precluded a positive Soviet attitude towards Israel (Roi, 2003:21-22).

However, Suez Canal crisis in 1956 witnessed the deterioration of the relation while the June war of 1967 led to end the diplomatic relationship between the Israel and the USSR. Despite this, there were some communications between the two. They were maintained through a variety of channels, direct as well as indirect. The former was operated through lower-level officials or outside intermediaries. For example, representatives of the Russian Patriarchate were sent periodically to Israel, ostensibly to look after the interests of the Russian Church and its property in Jerusalem. The Finnish Embassy represented Israel’s interests in the Soviet Union. There was also backdoor diplomacy; for example, in September 1977 two envoys flew from the USSR to hold secret meetings with Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Israeli and Soviet ambassadors were periodically authorised to conduct private meetings in Vienna or other European capitals.

The final channel was the ministerial meetings between the two countries. There were nine publicised meetings between the Foreign Ministers and most of them took place during the United Nations General Assembly session. They were: Abba Eban- Andrei Gromyko (December 1973 during the Geneva Conference); Yigal Allon- Andrei Gromyko (December 1975); Yitzhak Shamir- Andrei Gromyko (September 1981 and September 1985); Shimon Peres- Eduard Shevardnadze (September 1986 and September 1987); Yitzhak Shamir- Eduard Shevardnadze (June 1988); and Moshe Arens-Eduard Shevardnadze (December 1988 in Paris at a special conference on banning chemical warfare; and again, at Cairo, in February 1989). It was hard to detect a pattern for these sporadic exchanges but one can discern two logical motivations. One was to prevent actual hostilities and the other was the growing awareness in the USSR that Israel was

² Doctors’ Plot, in which a number of doctors most of whom had unmistakably Jewish names, were charged with having plotted to murder Soviet leaders, in collaboration with Western intelligence services, and were specifically linked to “the international Jewish bourgeois-nationalist organization ‘Joint’ and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee leaders Solomon Midkoels and Boris Shimeliovich. For detail see, Roi Yaacov (2003), “The Deteriorations of Relations: from Support to severance”, *The Journal of Israeli History*, 22(1): 20-36, spring.

not easily intimidated and that Israel had to be acknowledged as a central factor in regional politics and could not be written off. Such awareness usually occurred whenever the USSR felt it was being squeezed out of the West Asia and was maintained in the Arab-Israeli peace process by the policies of the US. (Klieman, 1990: 195-196).

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR in March 1985, the West Asia was clearly a major area of superpower competition. The USSR backed the Arab forces such as Algeria, Iraq, Libya, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Syria in their confrontation with Israel and viewed Egypt, an ally of the US, as an enemy. The USSR with no diplomatic relations with Israel had reduced Jewish emigration from the USSR to less than 1,000 per year (as opposed to 51,000 in 1979), and continued to champion the 1975 anti-Israeli resolution of the UN General Assembly that called Zionism as Racism (Freedman, 1995:233-234). In this context, Gorbachev's most significant policy was the normalization of relation with Israel in October 1991. Despite extensive criticism, Gorbachev allowed the resumption of massive Jewish immigration from the USSR to Israel. Cultural contacts between the two expanded dramatically and many famous Soviet artists, writers and musicians visited Israel. And he also stated that the absence of Soviet-Israeli relations was abnormal (Polsky, 1994:25).

At the same time, Soviet officials were very reluctant to visit Israel and the USSR officially demanded political concessions from Israel concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict before USSR would re-establish diplomatic ties with the Israel. The Soviets wanted, for example, Israel's acceptance of the PLO and direct negotiations with the official Palestinian leadership. They also sought Israel's approval of and participation in an international conference with the US and the USSR as co-chairman. It appeared that Soviet leadership was still concerned about a possible Arab backlash if it restored relations with Israel. First, in 1986 the Soviet exchanged consular delegations with Israel and by early 1991, it was upgraded as Consulate General and Israel did the same in the USSR. However, only on the eve the Madrid Peace Conference that full diplomatic relation between the two countries was restored in October 1991. The USSR also decided to support the US-led initiative in December 1991 to repeal the 1975 UN General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism (Freedman, 1995: 234). Like in other

areas of Israel-Soviet relations, the Soviet position on Zionism was changing slowly and supported the repeal of the anti-Zionist resolution. These happened only after the August 1991 coup, when Gorbachev's power was nominal and his days as the leader of the Soviet were numbered (Polsky, 1994:25).

Israel-Russia Relation after the Cold War

In the early 1990s, world entered into a period of continuous and drastic changes and was transforming from bipolar to multipolar international system or in the words of Samuel P. Huntington, to a Uni-multipolar system (Huntington, 1999: 35). In this complicated and volatile post-cold war world, all major countries started re-examining and adjusting their bilateral and multilateral relations in accordance with their national interest. This transformation again brought attention to the international community that nations do not have eternal friends and perpetual enemies but only permanent national interest. Israel and Russia were no exception to this trend. Both have adopted a new approach to their bilateral relations.

From the Israel's point of view, there were four central interests. The first was to maintain the steady flow of immigration, which has provided Israel with a large number of scientists and engineers. The second interest was to prevent the export of nuclear weapons or nuclear materials to Israel's enemies, such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq and to limit the supply of conventional weapons to these countries. The third goal was to develop trade relations with Russia, which supplied Israel with such products as uncut diamonds, metals, and timber and explore joint enterprises with the help of Jews who had emigrated from the former USSR. Finally, Israel hoped to have at least an "even-handed" Russian position in the West Asia and, if possible, Russian influence on its erstwhile ally, Syria, to be more flexible in reaching a peace agreement with Israel (Freedman, 1998:149).

Russian interests in Israel were basically four-fold. The primary interest was economic. The Second major Russian interest was diplomatic. By maintaining good ties with Israel, Russia apparently hopes to keep a door open to the Washington especially when Russia-American ties become strained, as happened during 1994-1996. Thirdly, a close ties with

Israel also enabled Russia to play, or at least appeared to play, a major role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. The fourth Russian interest was a cultural one. With more than a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union, almost all of them Russian-speaking, Israel has the largest Russian Diaspora outside the former Soviet Union. There are extensive cultural ties between the two countries, with Israel hosting a large number of Russian artists, pop singers, newspapers, and even cable TV programmes (Freedman, 1998:148-49).

Since the 1990s, Israel and Russia have established considerably good relation in every field. Both have improved the trade relation in various fields including agricultural products, medicine, energy, Science and technology etc. They established a joint commission on trade. Both have joint mechanism in the field of combating terrorism as well.

Economic and Technical Cooperation between Israel and Russia

The most important area of cooperation between Israel and Russia has been trade and science and technology. Israel announced Russia as one of the priority countries for promotion of the exports and of the bilateral trade in general. Several agreements were signed in the field of economic and technical cooperation between the two countries. It includes, trade and economic, scientific and technical cooperation, healthcare and medical science, agriculture and associated industries, tourism, postal and electric communication, culture and education civil aviation and prevention of double taxation. Table 1 shows the bilateral agreements that exist between Israel and Russia. Moreover, Israel and Russia have signed an inter-ministerial Memorandum on Mutual Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Perfecting of Professional and Language Training of Diplomatic Personal on 13 August 1998. On 25 March 1999, they added an intergovernmental Program of Cultural Cooperation. They also negotiated an agreement on investment protection, in the area of standardization, on cooperation in industrial R&D on the governmental level.

Another area of potential cooperation between both countries has been in the transport of oil. Israel has a 42-inch diameter oil pipeline between Eilat on the Red Sea and Ashkelon that was built on the Mediterranean. This is believed to have a capacity of 400,000 b/d, with possible expansion to 1-1.2 million b/d (and 18 million barrels of storage capacity) (Rivlin, 2005:42). During the Cold War this was originally designed to transport Iranian oil northwards. In 2003, the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company completed a project that would enable oil to be piped southwards, with the aim of making it available to Russia. The pipeline would enable Russia to sell its oil in South and Southeast Asia with lower shipment costs than those incurred by using the Suez Canal or the proposed Egyptian SUMED (Suez-Mediterranean pipeline) pipeline. Russia's Tyumen Oil Company (as well as Kazakh interests) was keen to explore the possibility of exporting crude via the Mediterranean and the pipeline to Eilat, where it could be loaded onto VLCCs (Very Large Crude Carriers) for markets in Asia. This would represent an alternative to the Suez Canal, which can accommodate only smaller tankers. (Rivlin, 2005:42)

Moreover, since the early 1990s Israel's dependence on Russian energy has increased. Following June 2004 meeting between Alexey Miller, the Chairman of Gazprom and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel promised to increase import of energy from one percent of its demand to as high as to 25 percent by 2025 (Bourtman, 2006:2-3). In November 2005, it was reported that the Blue Stream Natural Gas Pipeline- a \$3.4 billion dollar project between Russia and Turkey-would be expanded to Israel through the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. This route would allow Russian and Azerbaijani oil and gas to be exported by tanker through the Red Sea to China and through the Suez Canal to Southern Europe. If the Blue Stream Pipeline was expanded to Eilat, Israel would become a major regional oil and gas hub, receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in tariff revenues and achieving some energy security. In-March 2006, following a return visit by Alexy Miller to Israel, acting Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert declared that the Russian energy giant "had agreed to supply Israel with gas" (Bourtman, 2006:2-3).

Russia also had interests in the Israeli civilian market. Israel has been its third largest (\$ 688 million) market in the West Asia. Iran became the second largest trading partner of

Political and Economic Aspects of Israel-Russia Relations

Russia with \$ 1,319 million in year 2004 (Table 1.1 and Figure1.1). Turkey had largest trade with Russian \$ 4,754 million (Rivlin, 2005:44). In addition to merchandise exports, revenue from Israeli tourists, primarily former Russians, was also significant. Following Table gives the breakdown of Israel's trade with Russia in 2004. It further shows that Russian exports to Israel, totalling \$688 million, were dominated by sales of diamonds, base metals, another mineral products and chemicals. Israel's exports to Russia came to \$319 million, of which over \$130 million were machinery and other manufactured items (Rivlin, 2005:44).

Political and Economic Aspects of Israel-Russia Relations

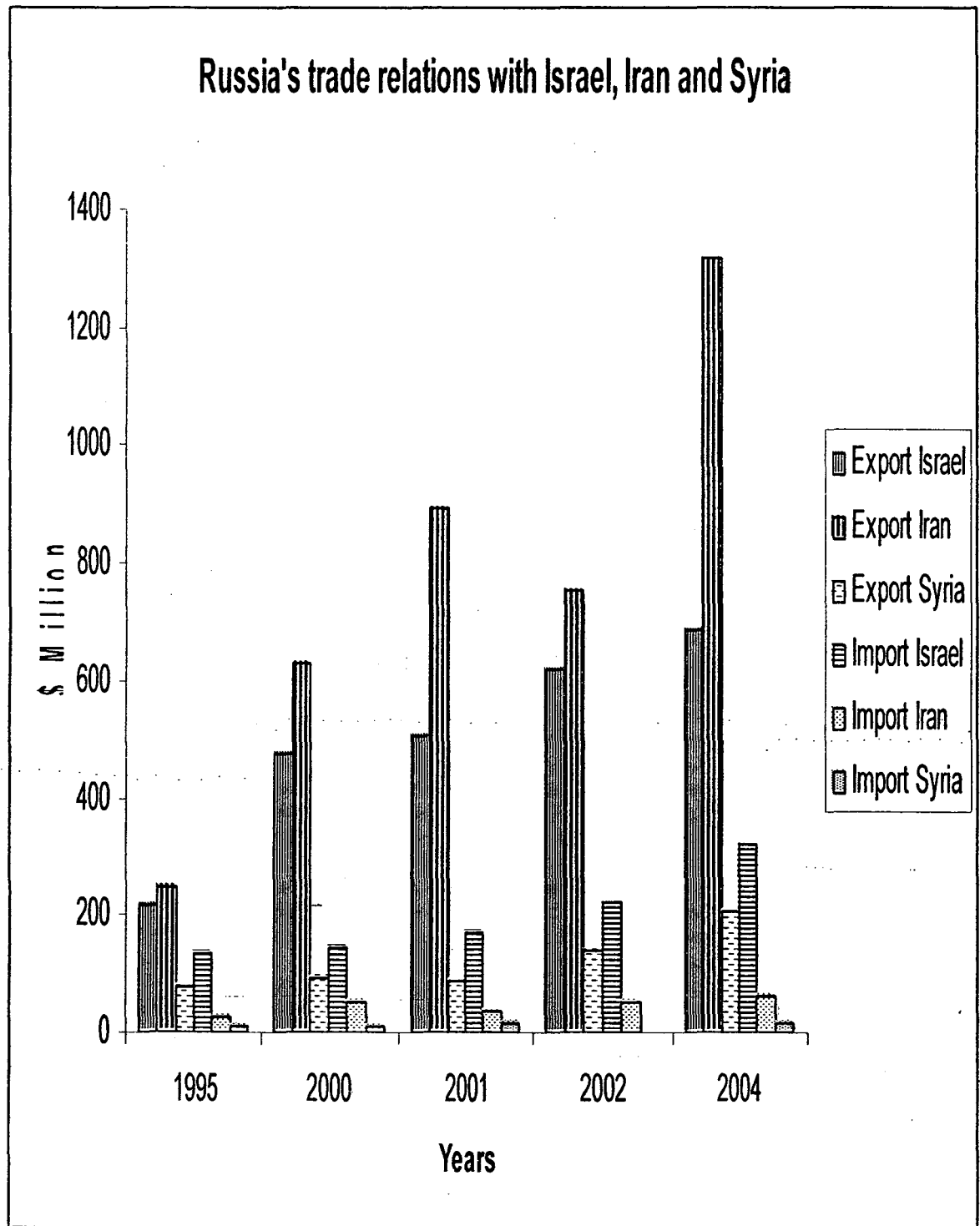
Table 1.1. Russia's Trade with Israel, Iran and Syria (\$ Million)

		1995	2000	2001	2002	2004
Export	Israel	215	473	507	618	688
	Iran	249	630	894	752	1,319
	Syria	75	95	89	138	209
Import	Israel	133	146	172	221	319
	Iran	27	54	34	50	61
	Syria	11	11	17	2	14

Sources: Adopted from Rivlin Paul (2005), "The Russian Economy and Arms Exports to the Middle East," Tel Aviv University: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum No.79 pp.32-33, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo79.pdf>.

Figure 1.1. Russia's trade with Israel, Iran and Syria

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Source: Adopted from the sources of Table 1.1



Additionally, Israel and Russia have established Joint Commissions to steer their economic activities. In June 1995, Russia hosted the first session of a joint Israeli-Russian Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. From 1995 to 2006 six sessions on Israel-Russia Trade and Economic Cooperation were held.³ The issues discussed included the prospect launching large joint economic projects in the fuel and energy complex, industrial and transport construction (including the possible construction of a subway system in Tel Aviv), telecommunications, medicine and medical industry aircraft industry, and space exploration. From 2004 to 2006 trade between both countries were increasingly significant because of the Putin's pro-Israel policy. Putin has done more than any other Russian leader to improve economic and strategic ties with Israel. In April 2005, he stated, "We have all the conditions for success, and most important, there is the will and desire on both sides to strengthen our friendship, trust and cooperation and to build a constructing partnership together" (Bourtman, 2006:2). At the same time, as would be discussed the Russia's dealings with some of Israel's adversaries have complicated the full development of Israel-Russia ties, as was seen in Israel's response to the Russia's policy towards Hamas.

Trade between both countries has doubled under Putin and it was close to \$1.5 billion in direct trade and over a billion in energy deals. Israeli and Russians are working together in heavy industry, aviation, energy, and medicine. Israel's exports to Russian in telecommunication apparatus was accumulated for the largest segment (\$ 120 million) and Israel imported the large amount of Diamonds, polished (\$ 558 million) and Diamonds, rough (\$236 million) flat rolled products of iron (\$ 43 million) from Russian (Central Bureau of Statistics .2005)

As far as the contribution of the Russian immigrated Jews in trade relation is concerned, it creates a natural economic bridge between the both countries. The Russian speaking Jews, almost one million, approximately constitutes 20 percent of Israel's population. Many of them have dual Israel/Russian citizenship and business interests and ties in both countries. Among the immigrants, there have been several powerful Russian oligarchs

³ Second in Israel (November 1997), third in Russia (January 2000), fourth in Israel (2002), fifth in Russian (June 2005), and sixth in Israel (November 2006).

including Leonid Nevzlin, Vladimir Dubov, and Mikhail Brudno (all former partners of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in Yukos), Vladimir Gusinsky (a media tycoon), and Arkadi Gaydamak (a suspected arms dealer). This led some allegation from the Russian Government that a number of businessmen illegally sent hundreds of millions of dollars into their bank accounts in Israel (Bourtman 2006:2).

Role of Russian Immigrants in Israel's Politics

The Russian immigrants played a decisive role in the formation of every government since the end of the Cold War. Their votes were decisive in the 1992 election, in turning the *Likud* government out of power. This happened not because they disagreed with its positions but because they held it responsible for the shortcomings in their absorption. In 1996, they again voted for the opposition - this time it was the *Likud* - for the same reason. The *Yisrael B'Aliya* (Israel is our home) party made its first appearance on the Israeli politics in 1996. This party was headed by Natan Sharansky, the former Soviet dissident won seven seats, a performance far beyond all expectations (Peters, 1997). Reasons were the structural factors (direct Prime Ministerial election) and content factors. Direct Prime Ministerial election gave two choices to the voters. The immigrant community opted for the *Likud* Prime Minister for the national mainstream and voted for the *Yisrael B'Aliya* for their particularist demands as a distinct community (Bick, 1997: 127).

Yisrael B'Aliya raised the burning issues like social and economic agenda of the immigrants, injured community pride, a national renewal of Zionist values etc. On question of peace process *Yisrael B'Aliya* followed a dual policy. On the one hand, it supported the continuation of the peace process as the Labour Party. On the other hand it advocated opposition to territorial concession as the *Likud* Party. Moreover, it opposed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, as did the *Likud* and some members of the Labour Party (Bick, 1997: 135). This gave the *Yisrael B'Aliya* a centrist characteristic leading to victory in this election. Whereas both dominant parties were focusing on the national mainstream issues, they were keeping sectarian issues aside to

secure the Prime Ministerial seat. It was the surprise for the both Labour Party and *Likud* Party. *Yisrael B'Aliya* was not only played a decisive role in the formation of government but it secured two powerful ministerial seats in the coalition government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu. Natan Sharansky became the Minister of Industry and Trade and Yuli Edelstein got Ministry of Immigrant Absorption (Peters, 1997). Additionally, two immigrant leaders were appointed to senior positions; Avigdor Lieberman became Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office, and another Ze'ev Geizel became the Prime Minister's adviser for *aliya* and absorption matters (Khanin, 2001:104). These positions made the Russian immigrants a powerful force in the Israeli politics.

Table 1.2. Russian immigrants Political Parties in Israeli politics

Years	Name of Party	<i>Yisrael B'Aliya</i>	<i>Yisrael Beiteinu</i>
1996	Percentage of Total votes	5.8	
	No. of Seats	7	
1999	Percentage of Total votes	5.1	2.6
	No. of Seats	6	4
2003	Percentage of Total votes	2.15	
	No. of Seats	2	
2006	Percentage of Total votes		8.98
	No. of Seats		11

Sources: Adopted from the Knesset site,

http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res.htm

Interestingly, Russian immigrants remained the dominant players in 1999 Knesset election. The establishment of the *Yisrael Beiteinu* (Israel is Our Home) party by Avigdor Lieberman gave an alternative to the Russian voters. Instead of this division, both immigrants' parties, *Yisrael B'Aliya* and *Yisrael Beiteinu* were able to secure six and four

seats respectively (Table 1.2). In another words, collectively they increased the number of the immigrant representatives in the Knesset from seven to ten. The *Yisrael B'Aliya* became the part of the coalition Government headed by Ehud Barak. It secured prominent part by controlling the Interior (Natan Sharansky) and Immigration and Absorption (Yuli Edelstein) ministries which dealt with current and recent immigrants (Rubin, 1999). A new link between foreign countries and Israeli campaigning that appeared in the 1999 election was the Russian factor. In this election, not only the internal issues were dominant but the issues of the relation between Russia and Israel were also making the points. Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, who visited Russia twice in April 1999, stated that these trips would bring more immigrant votes. Leaders of *Yisrael B'Aliya* clearly expressed their view that courting Russia was a way to win votes from Russian immigrants. Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein admitted that his constituents liked seeing Israelis shaking hands with Russian leaders because "relations with Russia are held very high in Russian immigrant priorities" (Rubin, 1999a).

However, the immigrant voters were divided in more than two blocs. Shortly, before the 1999 election, *Yisrael B'Aliya* and *Yisrael Beiteinu* were challenged by other immigrant's organizations. One was *Tikva* (Nadezhda in Russian) founded by Alex Tentser, a noted critic of the establishment who in 1992-96 was the chairman of the Public Committee for Control over Electoral Promises. Another founder of Nadezhda was Slava Premysler, owner of a network of non-kosher food outlets in Jerusalem. The party, whose mission included the struggle for the rights of ethnically mixed families and for legalization of civil marriage, was widely identified as a Russian satellite of the One Israel bloc headed by Ehud Barak (Khanin, 2001:116).

The Russian immigrant voters undoubtedly played a crucial role during 2003 Knesset election. However, contrary to the election campaigns of the 1990s, the 2003 elections showed a high diversity in the Russian immigrants' support of various political parties. That also included an unexpected reduction in the influence of the immigrant parties, which ran so successfully in 1996 and 1999, and whose cooperation was so important for Sharon's victory in the 2001 direct election of the Prime Minister. In 2003, three leading

Russian parties became a part of all-Israeli party lists either before the elections or shortly after it (Khanin, 2004:146). On the far right, Avigdor Lieberman's *Yisrael Beiteinu* joined with the National Union during the course of the previous term. On the far left, Roman Bronfman's Democratic Choice Party, which had previously split from *Yisrael B'Aliya*, merged with the Leftwing *Meretz* during the election campaign. *Yisrael B'Aliya* led by Natan Sharansky, only managed to win two seats (Table 1.2) and joined with the *Likud* two weeks after the election (Brown, 2003).

One might suggest that these mergers represent the beginning of this group's absorption into Israeli society. More likely, however, was that these parties found it politically necessary to merge with other parties to retain influence in the Knesset. The poor electoral performance of these parties was partially due to the renewed Palestinian-Israeli violence, which pushed more electorates to vote along security rather than sectarian lines. An equally important factor was that the election law - which since 1996 had given the public one vote for Prime Minister and another for the legislature - had reverted to its previous form of one vote for one party (Brown, 2003).

The return of immigrants' parties into the Israeli political arena as an independent political entity was unexpected in 2006 Knesset election. One of the surprise stories of the elections was the *Yisrael Beiteinu* list, headed by former Transport Minister and Director-General of Prime Minister's Office Avigdor Lieberman. *Yisrael Beiteinu* was not only secured 11 seats in Knesset but was able to get 8.98 percent of total votes (Table.1.2). *Yisrael Beiteinu's* programme, however, did not focus mainly on the parochial concerns of the immigrants. Instead, it showcased its deeply controversial plan for the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Lieberman professed opposition to the unilateralism of *Kadima* but envisaged the creation of a Palestinian state. Lieberman recommended, however, a series of border adjustments which would place Arab towns in Israel within the borders of the future Palestinian state. Such a notion represents a major departure from the traditional thinking of the Israeli right wing (Spyer, 2006). The withdrawal of Bronfman's Democratic Choice Party from the race at the beginning of the

campaign left Lieberman's *Yisrael Beiteinu* as the only immigrant party, which was able to claim the status of a community consensus movement (Khanin, 2007:355).

Moreover, there were other factors also which led to the emergence of *Yisrael Beiteinu*. Firstly, dissatisfaction of the group of immigrants from the government's socio-economic policies. There was also a group among mostly right-wing immigrants' that were dissatisfied with the government's shift to a policy of unilateral concessions embodied in disengagement from Gaza. Thus, an immigrants' opinion poll, conducted by the Tel Aviv based institute *Mutagim* in early November 2003, showed that only 35.2 percent of respondents supported the government's security policy while 42.5 percent did not support it. The opinion poll also showed that just 14.1 percent were satisfied (against 67.0 percent dissatisfied) with the Sharon's government's record in the socio-economic sphere; while 51.4 percent believed that the government had lost control over the Israel's economy (Khanin, 2007: 348)

Secondly, the majority of the Israeli establishments understood the results of the 2003 elections to indicate that the immigrant community was satisfied with their status in society. Therefore, they did not deserve special support as a group, including new projects of integration, promotion, or advancement in national and local government institutions, state-owned companies, social, educational and humanitarian structures, etc. This conclusion contradicted the real situation and did not meet the hopes and expectations of the "Russian Street". This was immediately utilized by political interest groups. There was disproportionate relationship between the political potential of almost a million Russian speakers and the community's political representation.

Third, since 2003, the forgotten immigrant issues such as abuse and ethnic discrimination by Israeli police, once again became a part of the community agenda. Numerous reports of the beating of new immigrants by policemen (mostly of "Mizrahi" origin) had great public resonance. In the course of research on the legal security of Russian-speaking immigrants, conducted in 2004 by the Edan Khadash Civil Society Institute, 78 percent suspected the police had a negative approach to Russian immigrants; 52 percent thought

that discrimination by law enforcement institutions against new immigrants was a 'very major' or a 'fairly major' issue; and 21 percent had personally encountered illegal and discriminatory police behaviour (Khanin, 2007: 348).

Strategic Cooperation

Since 1991, the security cooperation between the Israel and Russia blossomed into military cooperation. In December 1995, Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev made an official visit to Israel, meeting Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak. He also visited the Ramat David Air Forces, Israel's state military industries, Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Museum and Memorial), and Yitzhak Rabin's grave. During his visit, he signed a five-year bilateral agreement for military-technical cooperation (which was extended in 2000). Both signed a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding in Military Cooperation, which envisaged the development of contact between the defence ministries of the two countries (Antonenko, 2001: 43). Since then Israel and Russia have pursued military cooperation that envisaged the development of contact between the Defence Ministries of the both countries (Freedman, 1998:155).

In May 1997, Russian Interior Minister Viktor Kulikov came to Israel on a five-day visit with the purpose of strengthening security cooperation between the two countries in the areas of organized crime and terrorism. Kulikov signed an agreement with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy for the establishment of a permanent office of the Russian Interior Ministry at the Russian Embassy in Tel-Aviv and the establishment of an office for the Israel's Interior Ministry at the Israeli Embassy in Moscow. Both countries signed an agreement for joint action to maintain security on airline flights. On 20 June 1997, the Russian arms sale agency, Rozvooruzheniye signed an agreement with Israeli aircraft industries to jointly produce the A-50 radar early warning aircraft (AWACS). Under the agreement, Russia would do 90 percent of the work on the airframe while Israel would supply the radar system. There was also discussion for the joint modernization of Russian MIG-21 and MIG-29 fighter planes (Freedman, 1998:161).

Military cooperation between Israel and Russia differs significantly from Russia and other West Asian States, in that Israeli technology has been added to Russian aircraft rather than Russia selling weapons systems to Israel. The two countries have cooperated in upgrading Russian equipment, most significantly aircraft, though this activity has not always run an even course. Moreover, Israel has developed the know-how and has managed to capture a large share of market for upgrading former Soviet equipment. Israel and Russia cooperated in upgrading aircraft, sold by Russia to India and China, as well as for Central European and African markets. Many former Soviet scientists who were working in the military-industrial complex before immigrating to Israel provided the basis for this know-how. This cooperation became strategically important to Russia, which was seeking ways to compete arms sales in the developed markets in Europe and in East Asia, which are impossible without foreign electronics (Rivlin, 2005: 42).

Although, Israel's cooperation with Russia proved very important for Russia's global arms export ambitions, a number of concerns were repeatedly voiced in Russia about this cooperation. Many Russian experts claimed that Israel received a disproportionately large share of profit from the sale of upgraded equipment. Others claimed that Russia's military cooperation with Israel could undermine Russia's plans to expand military cooperation with other West Asian and Arab countries. And finally, there were claims that Russia cannot consider Israel as a reliable strategic partner for future upgrades because of the US influence over Israel could sabotage future contracts. Concerns over the reliability of Israeli cooperation were tested in April 2000 when the US pressured Israel to cancel its contract to install the Elta Phalcon phased-array radar (Airborne Early Warning System) on the Russian A-50 airframe for export to China (Rivlin, 2005:42). US Secretary of Defence William Cohen announced that this system could change the balance of forces in the Taiwan Straits and endanger U.S. troops. Cohen also warned that China could sell the Israel technology to Iran and Iraq. Under continued American pressure, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak cancelled the sale on 10 July 2000 (Antonenko, 2001:44).

Cooperation has also extended to the realm of space technology. In 1998 Israel launched the Techsat-2 with the help of a Russian rocket launcher. Photo images were transmitted by EROS-A (Earth Remote Observation System), a commercial satellite made by Israel Aircraft Industries and Launched from Siberia in December 2000. In the spring of 2003, the Israeli and Russian Defence Ministries signed two agreements covering intellectual property, designed in part to protect Russian rights when Israel sells Russian-made platforms with its military technology added to them (Rivlin, 2005: 42).

The most visible area of cooperation between Israel and Russia has been in counter-terrorism. Israel was one of the first countries to support Russia after the Beslan tragedy in 2004 where almost 300 people, mostly children, were killed in a hostage standoff with Chechan rebels. "Israel, which has been struggling against terrorism for many years, stands alongside the Russian people and sends its condolences," Ariel Sharon stated: "There is no justification for terrorism and this is the time for the free, just and humanitarian world to unite and fight this horrific plague, which acknowledges neither borders nor limitations" (Leyden, 2004). This statement was not a break from the past. Since 1999, Israeli officials have stressed the similarity between Chechen and Palestinian Islamist violence and reiterated the need to respond forcefully to terrorism more broadly.

Following an onslaught of terrorist attacks between 1999 and 2004 on Russian apartment buildings, subways, airlines and theatres and inadequate and often bungled responses by security services, Russian intelligence services began serious collaboration with their counterparts in Israel. Though *Mossad* (Israel's intelligence agency) officials secretly held meetings with Russians at the Kremlin during Yeltsin's tenure and Putin's first years in office, the level of cooperation increased dramatically in the post-Beslan security environment. As Ehud Olmert, then-Israel's Vice Prime Minister, stated in November 2004, "I think there is a growing realization in Russia that they [Russia] have to become more prepared for future terror attacks and that it's a good idea to compare notes with us [Israeli]." (Bourtman, 2006:3). Senior level talks have focused on three areas: training, border security, and arms. Since 2004, Israeli and Russian anti-terror forces have secretly trained together, and there were plans to hold joint counter-terrorism exercises. The

Israeli police, by Russia's request, also prepared reports detailing alternative responses to the hostage crises at the Nord-Ost Theater and Beslan.

On the issue of border security, Israel has proposed that Russia reform its intelligence gathering and border-protection agencies. In November 2005, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that Israeli and Russian experts were jointly developing a plan for a security barrier along the border with Chechnya, similar to the Israeli barrier in Gaza and the West Bank. Dmitry Kozak, Putin's envoy to the Northern Caucasus region, had spent the majority of time since his appointment in March shuttling between Israel and Russia signing counter-terrorism arrangements and arms deals (Bourtman, 2006:3). In November 2005, for example, it was reported that Kozak had negotiated a deal whereby Israel would sell unmanned aerial vehicles to Russia to help patrol the border with Chechnya. Even the tension caused by visit to Russia by *Hamas* representative in March 2006 did not significantly disrupt counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries. A joint counter-terrorism working group, formed between the two law enforcement agencies in the autumn of 2004, met in Israel on 13 March (days after *Hamas*' visit) to create a single database of international terrorist organizations and their leaders. On the weapons front, the two countries are jointly producing and selling military equipment on the world market including helicopters and AWACS aircraft (Freedman, 2003:67).

One can argue that, the ideological confrontation between Zionism and Communism as Lenin advocated (ideals fairy tales) briefly changed following the establishment of Israel as an independent country. Not only the USSR supported establishment of Israel in United Nations Security Council but it was the first major power to give *de jure* recognition to Israel. This did not last long and both sides were responsible for the gradual deterioration of the relation Israel's growing proximity with the US on several issues like Korean War and economic assistance which made the USSR suspicious . At the same time the USSR's ideological conflict with the US contributed in the worsening relation of both. The nadir was reached in the June war of 1967 when the USSR brokered off diplomatic relation with Israel. But behind-the-scene communication continued.

When Gorbachev came to power in the USSR things were moving fast. His contribution of “new thinking” accelerated the transforming domestic as well as the foreign policy of the USSR. Israel got new environment, and both moved towards re-establishment of diplomatic relation. Sudden disintegration of the USSR drastically changed the entire calculation of international politics. Israel and newly established Russia worked within the newly transformed international system (Unipolar). Both established diplomatic relation and improved considerably good ties in the various fields. The role of Russian immigrants’ parties in the Israeli politics has been decisive in every Israeli Knesset election. Russian Immigrants parties not only were winning seats in Knesset but participation in the formation of Israeli government also (particularly *Yisrael B’Aliya* and *Yisrael Betuimu*). Israel and Russia crossed \$1 billion (US) in trade relation. Israel’s energy dependence on Russia increased unpredictably and both benefited from the strategic ties in the field arms and equipment. Israel got new market and Russia got advance technology. The most important area of cooperation became the combating terrorism. Israel and Russia also established joint mechanism in the field of counter-terrorism. By observing, all these multidimensional area of cooperation one can argue that Israel and Russian enjoyed very friendly relation in this area.

Chapter III

Role of the External Actors

While there is a significant improvement in Israeli-Russian relations, like any other bilateral relations, both the countries also suffered from contentious issues. Iran remains a major bone of contention between two and the biggest challenge for Israel comes from the continuous supply of Russian weapons to Iran and Syria. The Russian support to the militant Palestinian group *Hamas* also has a bearing on the Israeli-Russian relations. The implications of the US influence in the Israeli politics and the West Asian region as whole has become a challenge because of confronting position taken by the US and Russian regarding issues that affect the region (like Iran, Syria and *Hamas*). To understand the implications of the external actors such as Iran, Syria, and *Hamas* in particular and the US in general upon the Israeli-Russian relation, one must contextualize the relation of these external actors with Israel and Russia.

Role of Iran

Historically, Israel considered Iran as one of its strategic allies. In the 1950s, Israeli leaders formulated a geopolitical strategy to deal with the emerging decolonization of Arab neighbours. The 'periphery strategy' (articulated by Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion), was based on the idea that Israel should create an alliance with the non-Arab nations on its periphery such as Turkey, Ethiopia and Iran to outflank the bordering Arab countries (Beit-Hallahami, 1987:8). Through this Israel managed to partly get out of isolation and strengthened its national security. Accordingly, Israel took measures to further expand relations with Iran during the Pahlavi reign. On 6 March 1950, Iran became the second country in the West Asia (after Turkey) to accord *de facto* recognition to Israel; this was followed by a tortuous eighteen year relationship characterized by highs and lows (Bailer, 2002:38). The government of nationalist leader Muhammad Mossadeq decided to close Iran's consulate in Jerusalem in 1951 and the Arab states considered this decision as Iran's withdrawal of its *de facto* recognition of Israel. At the same time, Iran continued its discreet relations with Israel and relations between the two countries came to be more public in the late 1950s (Haji-Yousefi, 2003).

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It is argued that the Pahlavi regime took three major strategic considerations into account while dealing with Israel, namely, domestic, regional, and international compulsions. Internally, the Iranian State was in need of a strong intelligence service to establish its power bases and remove any obstacles or potential challenges to the Shah. Israel afforded all necessary help in this regard. The extensive cooperation between *Savak* (Iranian Intelligence Agency) and *Mossad* (Israeli Intelligence Agency) was effective in guaranteeing internal security of the Shah's regime (Haji-Yousefi, 2003). Secondly, at the regional level, Iran did not enjoy stability in the West Asian region. On the one hand, it faced threats from the Soviet Union. On the other, the hostility of Arab governments towards the Shah, especially that of Egypt (during the reign of Gamal Abdul Nasser) and Iraq (following the coup of 1958), was a major concern for Iran. Furthermore, Israel also considered the Soviet Union and Arab governments of the West Asia, as its most important enemies. Hence, the cooperation between the two countries also meant counteracting these common regional threats. Finally, at the international level, the Shah seriously wished to strengthen relations with the US. Because of the strategic relations of Israel and the US, and great influence of the Jewish lobby in the US, the Shah sought to expand relations with the US by strengthening relations with Israel (Reppa, 1978:70-71).

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the relation between Israel and Iran were immediately severed and the former embassy of Israel was placed at the disposal of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The regional policy of Iran at the start of the Islamic Revolution was a confrontational one, based on the ideological and humanitarian notion that the Zionist state was a 'usurper' regime occupying the Palestinian land—an important part of the Muslim lands—causing displacement and innumerable sufferings to the Palestinians (Haji-Yousefi, 2003). Israel was perceived as an agent of, rather than a driving force for, the US interests in the region. Officially, the Islamic republic does not recognize Israel as a legitimate state and the government publications describe Israel as a “Zionist entity of immigrant European Jews implanted in the Middle East by Britain and the United States to perpetuate their own imperialist and hegemonistic designs” (Hooglund, 1995: 88)

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Despite the confrontational orientation of Iran's foreign policy, Israel did not wish to cut off its relations with Iran, in the early years following the Revolution. One of the most important concerns of Israel was the presence of about 80,000 Jews in Iran. Therefore, it followed a pragmatic policy toward the Islamic republic and sought secret relations. Some have claimed that Israel not only continued its secret relations with Iran, but also sold weapons to the latter.¹ Hirsh Goodman claims that following the Islamic revolution on three occasions Israel had attempted to hold secret arms transactions with Iran.²

The relation between both underwent a drastic change, when Iran started acting more extremely against Israel. Furthermore, it was argued that Iran was obsessed with Israel, reflecting an extreme Islamic ideology, standard exploitation of anti-Israeli policies to gain power and influence in the regional environment (used previously by various Arab leaders such as Nasser, Hafiz al-Assad and others). It was also part of the efforts to divert domestic political unrest away to external hostility and from failures of the Islamic regime. In December 2001, President Hashemi Rafsanjani called the establishment of the Jewish state the "worst event in history" and declared, "If one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with [nuclear] weapons, the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything" (Sadr, 2005: 64). Similarly, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared, "the cancerous tumour called Israel must be uprooted from the region" (Raphe, 2005: 75).

In addition, in cooperation with Syria, Iran has been the major supporter of *Hezbollah*, Islamic militant groups that carries out attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon. The group constitutes an extension of Iranian power up to the Israeli border and makes Israeli territory vulnerable. *Hezbollah* has been received training from the Iranians and the Revolutionary Guards also have served as conduits for transferring financial and military assistance to *Hezbollah* and other groups favoured by Iran (Hooglund, 1995: 92). For many years, *Hezbollah* led attacks against Israeli towns, and, the Israeli withdrawal from

¹ The most widely known incident was the supply of weapons and spare parts known as the Iran-Contra scandal. For details see, "Iran-Contra Affairs" (2001-2007), *The Columbia Encyclopaedia*, 6th ed. New York: Columbia University Press, <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ir/Irancont.html>; Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne (1993), *The Iran-Contra Scandal: the declassified history*, New York: The New Press.

² For details see, Hirsh Goodman, Jerusalem Post, November 1986, Quoted in Henry Paulucci (1991), *Iran, Israel and the United States*, New York: Griffon House, pp.213-215.

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Lebanon in May 2000 has not removed the threats from *Hezbollah* as Israel found out during the second Lebanon war in 2006. Israeli security officials report that *Hezbollah* has acquired over 10,000 tactical missiles (according to some sources, the number has reached 13,000, including the Iranian-made Fajr-5, with a range of 75 kilometres), many of which are capable of reaching cities and industrial centres inside Israel. Moreover, *Hezbollah*, aided directly by Iranian officials, was viewed by Israel and others as being responsible for the terror blasts in Buenos Aires, Argentina, that destroyed the Israeli embassy and the Jewish community building in 1992 and 1994 respectively, killing dozens of people. In the realm of religious and propaganda warfare, *Hezbollah* (via its *Al Manr* satellite televisions broadcasts) has emerged as one of the most virulent sources of anti-Israeli incitement (Raphe, 2005: 76).

However, Russia's policies towards West Asian region were driven by its global ambition and domestic instability. Internationally, despite its economic and social crises, Russia policymakers have aimed at relatively modest goal of "a multi-polar system of international relations that reflects the diversity of the present-day world and its diverse interest in a real way." As Yevgeny Primakov, advocated:

For Russia, the transition to a multi-polar world will create the possibility of diversifying the directions of foreign policy and of developing constructive strategic relations immediately with some influential partners this increases the possibility of a manoeuvre necessary for ensuring the country's security under the conditions of a resource deficit and of the transition period in the development of our country, which is attended by difficulties.³

For Russia, multipolarity means overcoming what it views as America's post-Cold War hegemony. Thus, Russia seeks to identify itself with the "vast number of states" that

³ For details see Primakov Yevgeny (1998), "Russia and the outside World," *International Affairs*, 3: 7-13.

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object “to a world order dominated by one power,” and use this joint opposition to the US hegemony to play the part as a leading state on the international scene.⁴

Internal factors also drive Russia’s West Asian engagement. The rise of separatist hotspots- foremost among them being the protracted Chechen conflict- has focused its attention on the West Asia’s growing ability to influence politics in Russia as well as in its “near abroad”- the Caucasus and Southern Eurasia. So Russia engages Iran, in part to keep it from aggravating Russia’s escalating struggle with militant Islam in the Caucasus. Russian policymakers began to stress:

Iran can have both stabilizing and a destabilizing role on the Muslim regions of Russia. We need a broad spectrum of co-operation with Iran. The broader the co-operation, the narrower is the possibility of anti Russian actions from extremist forces in Iran (Berman, 2001:21).

The region’s volatile politics also makes it a lucrative market for Russian arms export, vital to its struggling military-industrial complex. Russia perceived this region as a major source of hard currency (Freedman, 1997: 97). This has led Russia to resuscitate its Cold War patron-client relationships with countries like Syria and Iran. Indeed, an article in the newspapers, *Segodnia*, in late May 1995 noted:

Cooperation with Iran is more than just a question of money and orders for the Russian atomic industry. Today a hostile Tehran could cause a great deal of unpleasantness for Russia in the North Caucasus and in Tajikistan if it were really to set its mind to supporting the Muslim insurgents with weapons, money, and volunteers. On the other hand, a friendly Iran could become an important strategic ally in the future (Freedman, 1997:103)

Finally, the convergence of interests between the official government driven by security calculation and those of powerful domestic lobbies over oil and gas has also contributed to Russia’s involvement in the region (Berman, 2001:5).

⁴ Primakov, cited in Dimitri K. Simes (1999), *After the Collapse: Russia Seeks its Place as a Great Power*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p 217.

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Therefore, in these different confronting perspective of Israel and Russia towards Iran made the relation more suspicious. Israel perceived Russia's closer relation with Iran as well as Syria the most dangerous for its national security. Whereas Russia's national interest (economic security) means improved relation with Iran and Syria, particularly in the field of arms trade. In another words, conflict between these two calculations has led to mutual suspicions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Iran was the USSR's third largest trading partner in the developing world, after India and Egypt. Soviet arms were first supplied to the Shah in 1967. Following the refusal by the US, the USSR provided favourable credits for the Isfahan steel plant. This however, did not cause a shift in Iranian proximity from one superpower to the other in the way that the finance and construction of the Aswan dam in Egypt did. Despite some progress in the 1970s, Iran largely remained an American ally in the region. Soviet Union welcomed the Islamic Revolution of 1979, insofar as it was anti-Western. Given its close relations with Iraq, the USSR sold few weapons to Iran during the prolonged Iran-Iraq war. Between 1980 and 1983, new weapons sales agreements between the two countries reached \$615 million but during 1984-87 they fell to only \$5 million (Cordesman, 1990:49). However, after the Iran-Iraq war ended, the international embargo on Iraq pushed the Soviets closer towards Iran. In 1989, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani, signed a framework agreement in Moscow on arms supplies and cooperation in the development of nuclear energy. This was followed by a large increase in deliveries, during 1987-91 totalled \$2.1 billion. With the end of the war in Afghanistan and the fall of communism, Russia became a much more attractive source of supply for Iran (Kam, 2004: 66).

Over the past decade, Russia's military cooperation arrangements with Iran have been more extensive and Iran has emerged as the third largest client for Russian arms after China and India. Since the two countries signed a bilateral military-technical cooperation agreement in 1989 (signed with the Soviet Union but inherited by Russia), until 2001 Russia has supplied Iran with equipment and services worth over \$4 billion. Among all the Russian clients in West Asia, Russia-Iranian cooperation was the most advanced in terms range of weapons systems sold by Russia and in the scale of technical cooperation.

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Between 1992 and 2000, Russia sold to Iran three Kilo-class submarines, over 200 T-72 tanks, ten Su-24 and eight MiG aircraft. Moreover, Iran has acquired licenses for the production of T-72C and BMP-2 armoured fighting vehicles. Russia has also provided Iran with a large number of military advisers who have trained its military, including submarine crews, to operate advanced Russian weapons systems and helped set up licensed production arrangements. Russia was suspected of helping Iran in the development of ballistic missile technology. There have been reports that Russia has sold SS-4 SSM technology and assisted in the development of a dual use communications satellite system (Rivlin, 2005: 38). A number of Iranian military officers were attending Russian military schools. Many private Russian citizens (some estimate more than 500) were working in Iran and were suspected of providing military-technology related expertise (Antonenko, 2001: 36).

In 1995, Russia and Iran signed an agreement that included a \$780 million contract to build a light water nuclear reactor at Bushehr. This was project started by a West German consortium in 1974 but halted following the 1979 revolution, which ended the German involvement. About 80 percent of the construction was completed at that time. Bushehr was bombed several times by Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war. The 1995 agreement called for completion of two 1,300-MW pressurized light water units as well as the supply of two modern VVER-440 units (Rivlin, 2005: 36). Since then, work has proceeded at Bushehr, but not on any of the other projects agreed on.

The Russian supply of weapons to Iran became an issue of increasing concern for the US. In 1995 the US Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin signed an agreement (known as The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement) under which Russia would cease supplying weapons to Iran , once existing contracts were fulfilled in 1999. At the same time, Russian President Yeltsin promised American President Bill Clinton that “Russia, which had agreed to sell Iran an atomic reactor, would not build a nuclear centrifuge plant for Iran.”(Freedman, 2006:6-7) When Putin became the President of Russia, he wanted to restore Russia to the ranks of the great powers, and this became clear soon after he took office in 2000. In his period Russia sought to achieve three major goals in the West Asian region. The first was to

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demonstrate Russia's renewed power and influence in a region where the US influence was on the decline. The second was to increase trade with the nations of the region, so as to buttress to Russian economy, especially its non-energy sectors. The third goal was to minimize Arab, Turkish and Iranian support for the Chechen rebellion against Russian control, where the rebels were fighting Russian forces in the name of Islam (Freedman, 2007:19).

The Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement became controversial in both countries. Russian officials argued that the agreement covered only Russia's obligation in the field of nuclear and missile technologies. The US Congress questioned the judgement of the Clinton administration in agreeing that Russia could complete the sale of arms to Iran (including tanks, armoured personnel carriers and Kilo-class submarines). The administration responded by pointing out those arms transfers allowed under the agreement did not provide Iran with new weapons capabilities or alter the military balance of power in the Persian Gulf (Antonenko, 2001: 36). However, a number of states, including Israel, expressed concerns over the content and scale of Russian arms transfers to Iran. American officials feared that if Iran makes nuclear weapons, it might fall into terrorist hands and threaten the US and other countries (El-Khawas, 2005: 27). For Israel, the Islamic republic acquiring nuclear weapons threaten its very existence as a Jewish state in at least three conceivable ways. First, Iran might launch a nuclear weapon directly at Israel. Second, Iran might transfer weapons to a terrorist organization such as *Hezbollah* that would launch them towards Israel. Third, Iran might be emboldened to attack Israel by conventional means or through terrorist proxies without the fear of retaliation (Sadr, 2005: 62).

Therefore, Russia's military supplies and cooperation in civilian nuclear energy with Iran have become a source of constant concern and tension in Russia's relations with Israel and the US. The US government has applied consistent pressure on Russia to reduce or even cancel some of its projects with Iran. In November 2000, the Putin government, however, decided to cancel the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement. The following month, the Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev, paid the first official visit to Tehran since the 1979 revolution. In March 2001, President Khatami visited Russia and President Putin

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announced that Russia would conclude new arms supply agreements with Iran. A technical-military agreement to this effect was signed in October 2001 (Kam, 2004:69). At the same time, Presidents Khatami and Putin agreed to expand bilateral cooperation on nuclear power. In November 2001, Russia delivered the first reactor to Iran, and in July 2002 Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom now Rosatom) outlined a plan to build six 1,000-MW reactors in Iran by 2010, including four at Bushehr and two at Akhvaz (Rivlin, 2005: 37).

It appears that early November 2000 Russia informed the US that it was withdrawing from its commitment not to supply Iran with conventional weapons, probably because of the profits to be made from such sales. The legal status of this agreement had always been in dispute. A particular concern was over any Russian assistance that might help Iran obtain nuclear and missile technology. Russian experts deny Russian governmental assistance, though the US claims that Russian institutions, companies and individual scientists, often without direct sanction from the government, provide assistance (Anttonenko, 2001:37). In 1999 the Israeli government declared that Russia's arms export control system has begun to erode further. Although President Putin has tried to reinforce the effectiveness of federal government controls, particularly in the sensitive military and other technology transfer fields, more measures would be required to dispel US and Israeli concerns.

Another aspect of Israel and the US concern was suspected Russian assistance to Iran in the development of ballistic missile technology. Some US intelligence reports claim that Russia has transferred unspecified quantity of SS-4 SSM technology to Iran and has been assisting Iran with the development of a national communications satellite with dual-use technology.⁵ The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), to which the Russian Federation belongs, is only a voluntary arrangement and not a treaty. Under MTCR regulations, sale of complete rockets and certain complete subsystems are not permitted by its members (Antonenko, 2001:38). However, Category II material-covering a wide

⁵For details see, Stephen Blank (1999), "The Spirit of Eternal Negation: Russia's Hour in the Middle East", in Stephen J. Blank, Ed. *Mediterranean Security into the Coming Millennium*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, pp.443-513.

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range of parts components and subsystems such as propellants, structural materials, test equipment and facilities, and flight instruments-may be exported at the discretion of the MTCR party on a case-by-case basis for acceptable end uses. In the absence of further information, it is difficult to assess whether MTCR guidelines were breached by any Russian technology transfer to Iran.

There are continuous concerns over the potential leakage of Russian technical expertise to Iran. In March, 2001 Israeli Minister of Trade and Industry Natan Sharansky charged that Russia “was not doing enough to stop the leakage of missiles technologies to Iran” (Antonenko, 2001: 38). Israeli concerns have resulted in the cancellation of its agreement with Russia for the sale of natural gas. Russian officials claims that the US and Israel have provide no proof for their allegations that Russian military specialists and defence institutes were continued to leak sensitive technologies to Iran.

The US strongly opposed to nuclear cooperation project and provided Russia with information pointing to the existence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. In May 2002, when US Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham met him, Minatom Head Alexander Rumyantsev stated that Bushehr “is not a source of proliferation of nuclear material” (Rivlin, 2005: 37). In June 2003, President Putin said that Russia would continue building a nuclear power station for Iran, but demanded that Iran’s nuclear programme would come under stricter international control. This statement was made a day after the Group 8 countries urged both Iran and North Korea to curb their nuclear programs. According to Putin, Russian nuclear cooperation with any country would be “based on the extent to which their programs are open and placed under the control of the IAEA” (International Atomic Energy Agency, the Vienna based nuclear watchdog). In a reference to worries of Russia’s rivals he added: “We are categorically opposed to bringing in any problems which could be used for unfair competitions, including on the Iranian market” (Rivlin 2005:37).

Russian officials have stated that the Bushehr project is consistent with a civil nuclear programme, and deny US accusations that oil-rich Iran has no need for nuclear power and has been secretly trying to acquire atomic weapons. Construction on Bushehr was to be

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completed by March 2004, but as a result of delays-described as technical-completion was re-scheduled for 2006. In August 2004, Iran said that the plant would start operating in October 2006. Since 2002-3, Russia has refused to supply fuel to the Bushehr reactor until an agreement was in place guaranteeing the safe and timely return of the reactor's spent fuel. In February 2005, Iran and Russia signed an agreement to return spent nuclear fuel from the Bushehr nuclear power plant, a move that paved the way for Iran to have Bushehr become operational. According to the agreement, Russia would provide the fuel needed to run the Bushehr plant, but the spent fuel would be sent back to Russia to ensure that Iran does not extract plutonium, which could be used to make a nuclear bomb.

This stems from the fact the while Putin sees his country's dealings with Iran primarily as an economic issue, Israel views it as a security concern. More than anyone else, Russian was aware that the market for their antiquated nuclear technology was shrinking, and that the \$10 billion agreement it signed in July 2002 to provide Iran with six nuclear reactors over the next decade was a deal that was desperate for the Russian nuclear industry (Mizin, 2004). The project, which employs several thousand top-grade Russian scientists who would otherwise struggle to find work, was to be paid in hard currency, something many of their other arms importers were reluctant to do (Freedman, 2003: 82). While centred on the sale of nuclear technologies, Russia's cooperation with Iran revolves around other areas as well. As reported in *Vremya Novostei* in April 2005, Tehran was in the process of purchasing Tu-204 jets and a communication satellite from Russia. In exchange for the cooperation, Tehran has floated the idea that Russian companies would be able to play a role in oil and gas projects in Iran (Bourtman, 2006, 4). Russia, was very confident towards the Iranian nuclear Program. In February 2005, a week before meeting his meeting President George W Bush, Russian President Putin met with Iran's security Chief Hassan Rohanin in the Kremlin. Putin declared that his government was convinced that "Iran indeed does not intend to produce nuclear weapons". He also announced, "We will continue to develop relations in all sectors, including peaceful atomic energy" (El-Khawas, 2005:35).

Israel interprets these Russia's dealings with Iran as a threat to its national security (Inbar, 2006: 88). If Iran uses the Russian civilian nuclear technology to build a nuclear

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weapon, it would cause a radical shift in the regional balance of power, possibly catalyzing a regional nuclear arms race (led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt). Such a path would also lead to a nuclear stand-off between Israel and Iran. The issue of Iran looms large over in all areas of Israeli-Russian relations, so much so that Robert O. Freedman, a leading expert on Russian-Israeli relations, believes that Russia is working against Israel on all the major issues (Bourtman, 2006, 5). For Israel, a nuclear Iran constitutes an existential threat. It sees the tripartite combination of a radical Islamic regime, long-range missile capability, and nuclear weapons to be extremely dangerous. Due to its small and dense population, Israel is extremely vulnerable to non-conventional attacks. In December 2005, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon termed the Iranian program "a grave threat" stressing that Israel "cannot accept a nuclear Iran (Inbar, 2006: 92). This statement was a reflection of a long-held threat perception of a large part of Israel's strategic community. Indeed, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1992-95) already perceived "Islamic Iran which was engaged in acquiring a nuclear capability and in sponsoring terror, as Israel's arch-enemy" (Inbar, 1999:119).

Moreover Israel's fears are exasperated by the election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in June 2005. He has contributed to Israel's fears by issuing a series of inflammatory statements. On 26 October 2005, paraphrasing a speech made by late Ayatollah Khomeini, he called for "Israel to be wiped off the map" (Ganji, 2006: 4). On 14 December 2005, in a speech that was televised live Ahmedinejad denied that the Holocaust had ever happened, suggesting that Israel's Jews should be relocated to Europe or even to Alaska. Such statements from high-ranking public officials cannot be dismissed as pure rhetoric; they reflect a policy preference and an Iran strengthened by a nuclear arsenal might pursue such a policy (Inbar, 2006: 93)). In addition, Iran was allied with Syria, another state with an anti-US predisposition, and seeks to create a radical Shi'a corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean. According to the US State Department, Iran considered as the most active state sponsor of terrorism (Inbar, 2006: 88).

For Russian, the nuclear issue was not high enough on its list of most pressing security concerns to jeopardize other key interests. Russia prefers the *status quo* and considers the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran to be an unwelcome one, but not so unwelcome as to

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place other Russian interests at risk. The Russians appear more concerned about an American intervention that would jeopardize Russian commercial interests; complicate bilateral relations, including those with Israel and the US; cause further regional destabilizations; and set off strategic and economic ripple effects that Russia may be ill equipped to handle (Raphe, 2005:27-28). Some in Russian view the Iranian nuclear programme as chiefly aimed at the US and therefore useful in countering growing American influence and adventurism. At the same time, Russian officials understand that the issue was important for its principal interlocutors, namely, the US, the UK, Germany, Germany, and France, and Russia would not want to be cut out of any scheme they propose.

Role of Syria

The issue of Russian-Syrian cooperation has been an additional challenge for Israel and Russia relations. Israel perceived Syria as its enemy because both countries have not signed any peace treaty. Syria was part of every war of Arab –Israel war (except the Suez war of 1956) and the Golan Height, which was captured by Israel in 1967 war still remains a bone of contention between both countries. For Israel, Syria was considered as the source of terrorist in the sense it encouraged and supported militant organizations like *Hezbollah*. Another side, Russia considered Syria as a potential market for military export and regional influence. Therefore, both Israeli and Russian interests collide and resulted to the bigger challenges to the Israel and Russia relation.

Russia and Syria were historically united in their opposition to the US hegemony in the West Asia. They have a record of diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation that dates from the Soviet Period. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Russian armed forces, crippled by economic turmoil, have reduced training, force modernization, and military readiness. Consequently, Russia's active foreign arms sales programme reflected its efforts to alleviate the growing crisis within its unreformed, aging military and draw down its unwieldy surplus of military hardware. Russian defence industry and government officials believe, "the active promotion of Russian armaments" was leading

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to “ a new balance of power in which the United States will no longer play the decisive role”(Blank, 1997: 517).

The effects of Russia’s regional arms efforts were most clearly seen in the gradual deepening of the Syrian-Russian relationship. The massive Syrian debt to the USSR for military expenditures during the 1980s, totalling nearly \$11 billion, kept military trade to minimal levels throughout the early 1990s (Berman, 2001: 16). Beginning with 1997 Russia assumed a more flexible position on Syrian debt. In June of that year, Victor Gogitidze, the Russian Ambassador to Syria, publicly announced that Syrian debt “would not be an obstacle to boosting cooperation between the two countries in the various fields” (Feldman, 1998). That fall, Russia and Syria negotiated an additional \$3 billion arms purchase and concurrently, Russia’s Ministry of Atomic Energy (*Minatom*) began high-level contacts with the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission.

Syria’s drive for military modernization has been based entirely on the assumption of long-term Russian cooperation. Between 1980 and 1991, Soviet military supplies to Syria had surpassed \$26 billion, consisting of massive quantities of tactical missile systems, warships, tanks, and aircraft (Antanenko, 2001:38). The Syrian military has remained overwhelmingly reliant on this weaponry, with Soviet T-72, T-64, T-62 and T-55 tanks making up the bulk of its armoured force, and MiG-class fighter aircraft dominating its air force. Likewise, with approximately 1,000 SS-1 Scud B’s and close to 500 shorter-range SS-21 Scarab ballistic missiles, Syrian ballistic missile arsenal was built around Russian arms. In total, Soviet arms account for 90 percent of Syria’s military equipment, a large portion of which was in need of upgrading and maintenance (Berman, 2001: 16).

Russia and Syria have signed a major arms export contract for the supply of 1000 “Metis-M” (NATO designation AT-13) and *Kornet-E* (AT-14) anti-tank missiles worth \$138 million (\$73 million and \$65 million, respectively). This deal caused a lot of concern in the US and in Israel. In 1999 the US introduced sanctions against three Russian institutes and arms producers (the Instrument-Making Design Bureau in Tula, the Volsk mechanical plant and the Central Institute of Machine Building), who were planning to

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supply more advanced anti-tank weapons to Syria (Antonenko, 2001:39). Moreover, the Clinton administration linked any Russian supplies of advance weapons for Syria with continued the US aid to Russia. The Russian government expressed outrage over these sanctions and the missiles were reportedly delivered to Syria in 1999.

Israel expressed concern over the sale of the AT-14 *Kornet* third generation anti-tank guided missiles to Syria. According to *Jane Defence Weekly*, the AT-14 *Kornet* is designed mainly for the export market, and has an outstanding 5,000-meter range. The use of laser beam-riding technology for guidance enables similar operation with only limited training. While the *Kornet* does not pose a new challenge to Israeli main battle tanks, it poses a more serious threat in a static battlefield, such as southern Lebanon or the Golan Heights demilitarized zone, where its accuracy allows lethal attacks against fortified positions or medium-protected vehicles.⁶ These characteristics make *Kornet* a source of potential threat to Israel.

Moreover, the sale of such equipment to Syria violates the pledge made by Russia that it would only sell "defensive weapons and spare parts for arms sold to Syria under previous contracts. Russia does not sell offensive weapons to anyone." In contrast, in October 1999 the Russian Ambassador to Syria stated that "Russia will sell to Syria any modern weapons which it may require because Syria is not threatening any state's security and is not subject of international sanctions" (Antonenko, 2001:39). This statement demonstrates that the Russian government was determined to capture the Syrian arms market despite strong opposition from Israel and the US.

When Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia, he tried to improve relations with Syria because of three considerations. First, Russia felt it was capable of persuading Syria to make peace with Israel. Second, the fact that Tartus on the Syrian coast was Russia's only naval base in the Mediterranean, and third that Syria was prepared to pay hard currency for Russia to upgrade its old Soviet weapons as well as for new Russian supplies (Katz, 2006:53). These considerations led to a positive development of Russia

⁶ For details see *Janes Defence Weekly*, 30 (5), 5 August 1998.

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and Syria relations. However, the death of Hafiz Assad in June 2000, and the succession of his son, Bashar, delayed the improvement of Russia-Syria relations.

In January of 2000, stressing the continued importance of Russia's engagement in the West Asian arms market, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vassili Cerdin affirmed Russia's intentions to heighten military cooperation with Syria further.⁷ For its part, Syria views this cooperation as essential to its strategy. Internally weak and threatened by the Israeli-Turkish strategic relationship, Syria sees Russia as a "welcome partner in a counter alliance to preserve the balance of power in the region."⁸ There were several high official visits between both countries. In October 2000 Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov went to Syria and met the new President as well as with the Syrian Foreign Minister (CDPSP, 2000: 23). Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara, in turn, visited Russia in April 2001 (CDPSP, 2001a:17) and was soon followed by the Syrian Defence Minister Marshal Mustafa Tlas in May 2001(CDPSP, 2001a: 17-18). Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam came to Russia in January 2003 and met with Putin.

Despite their efforts to improve relations, there were some important differences between Russia and Syria. Russia has long sought to play a greater role in the US-led Arab-Israeli peace process. The Russian-Syrian differences over how to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict were evident in March 2000 when Russia along with 13 other members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) voted in favour of Resolution 1397 calling for the coexistence of an Israeli and a Palestinian state, while Syria (a non-permanent member of the UNSC) abstained.⁹ In addition, although Russia did vote in favour of UNSC resolution proposed by Syria and Sudan (which the US vetoed) calling upon Israel not to expel Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the occupied territories, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov have indicated Russia's lack of enthusiasm for the measure by saying that "the vote should not have been rushed" (CDPSP, 2003:16-17)). Nor was Russia willing to sell Syria all the weapons that it wanted. According to

⁷ For details on each of these events, see *Jerusalem Post*, 18 May 1998.

⁸ For details, see Gamal Nasser, "Bolstering Syrian-Russian Ties", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 3-9 June, 1999. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/432/re2.htm>

⁹ For details see, UNSC Resolution 1397, Press release SC/7326 in 12 March 2002, on UN website, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sc7326.doc.htm>

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Russian press accounts, Russia would not approve a Syria request to purchase Russian S-300 air defence missiles, which have a 200 kilometre range (CDPSP, 2001a: 17-18). Nor could Syria have been pleased when, in response to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's plea that Russia should not sell the much shorter range *Igla* portable air defence systems (*Manpads*) to Syria because of the fear that they would wind up in the hands of *Hezbollah*, Putin declared that "Russia will never help Israel's enemies" (CDPSP, 2002: 17)).

Interestingly, from 2004 Russia's relation with Syria improved. The motivating factors behind this were Syria's increasing international isolation since September 2004 when the UNSC approved Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Russia did not vote in favour of this resolution, but did not veto it either. It chose to abstain.¹⁰ The Syrian government appears to have felt threatened both by menacing the US statements about Syria's support for anti-US insurgents in Iraq and by the international pressure to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. Unlike their divisions over the question of intervention in Iraq, the US and the EU joined hands in working for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon (Katz, 2006: 57).

Since the beginning of 2005, Russian-Syrian relations appear to have undergone a dramatic improvement. Bashar Assad visited Russia and met with Putin in January 2005 - his first visit since becoming Syria's President. On this occasion, it was announced that Russia had agreed to write off 73 percent of Syria's \$13.4 billion debt to Russia. It also waived 90 percent of Syria's debt to the former Soviet Union (Freedman, 2007: 20). Moreover, Russia allowed Syria to repay the rest of the loan on terms extremely favourable to Syria: "The remaining \$3.618 billion will be paid off in instalments, with Syria paying \$170 million on the debt in 2005. Actually, only \$1.5 billion of the remaining sum will be repaid in hard currency over the next 10 years". The Syrian side "will invest the rest in joint projects within Syria." (CDPSP, 2005: 18-19). In addition, Russia agreed to sell to Syria the *Strelets* air defence missile system, consisting of vehicle-mounted short range surface-to-air missiles. According to a political

¹⁰ For details see, UNSC Resolution, 1559 Press Release SC/8181 on 2 September 2004, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8181.doc.htm>

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commentator, this deal was worth up to \$100 million (CDPSP, 2005c: 4). Putin himself confirmed that the deal had been "completed" in April 2005 (Katz, 2006: 56).

These improved Russia's relation with Syria had tremendous impact on Israeli-Russian relations. Israeli politicians and observers were especially upset that Putin was going ahead with the sale of air defence missiles to Syria after Israeli and the US leaders had repeatedly asked him not to do this. Several Russian observers noted that Russia's improved relations with Syria were coming at the cost of worsening relations with Israel—a trade off which some suggested was not in Russia's interests. (CDPSP, 2005c: 4)

Yet despite the genuine unhappiness expressed by Israeli officials over the missile sale, both governments acted to contain and minimize their differences. Some press reports indicated that Russia would sell Syria the *Iskander-E* with a flight range up to 280 kilometres that "could strike any target in Israel, including Dimona" (where Israel's nuclear weapons are believed to be located) (CDPSP, 2005: 18-19). During his visit to Israel in April 2005 though, Putin himself acknowledged that while Russian arms manufacturers did indeed want to sell the *Iskander-E* to Syria, he "personally nixed the deal," thus showing his concern for Israel's security (CDPSP, 2005b:7).

Press reports at the beginning of 2005 also suggested that Russia would sell Syria the *Igla* (or SA-18) *Manpads* with a range of five to eight kilometres. Russian officials appeared to be in a rush to sell these to Syria so that the deal would not be covered by the agreement on non-proliferation of *Manpads* that would be signed during the February 2005 Bush-Putin summit in Bratislava (CDPSP, 2005a: 3-4). Moreover, in April 2005, Russia sold *Strelets* surface-to-air missiles (*Manpads*) to Syria, thereby ignoring vocal Israel's the US concerns that the weapons could fall into the hands of *Hezbollah* (Bourtman, 2006: 5). Interestingly, it was announced that Russia would not sell *Manpads* to Syria, but instead would sell it the *Strelets* missile system, which consisted of *Igla* missiles mounted on vehicles. Regarding terrorists, Russia argued that they could not use these *Iglas*, since they did not include the portable firing platform. Putin himself told the Israeli press that this sale would not alter the military balance in the region against Israel (CDPSP, 2005a: 3-4). In addition, when asked on Israeli television whether he felt the

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sale of the *Strelts* defence system posed a threat to Israel, Putin won himself few friends in Israel by laughing at the question and stating that “sure, Israeli aircraft will no longer be able to fly over Bashar Assad’s palace (Bourtman, 2006: 5).

Israel expressed scepticism about these claims, but despite the warnings of some, the relationship did not appear to suffer to a very great extent. One of the Russia’s observer of Russia’s relations with the West Asia Georgiy Mirskiy, predicted that “deliveries of Russian missiles to Syria will not prompt a row” with Israel (Katz, 2006: 59) Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, President of Moscow’s Institute for the Study of Israel and the Near East and a strong proponent of close Russian-Israeli ties, said that the sale of Russian missiles to Syria would have “precisely the same effect on relations with Israel as the Americans’ arms exports to Saudi Arabia, that is, simply none at all” (Katz, 2006: 59). Putin’s visit to Israel (which also included Egypt but not Syria) in April 2005 and repeated expression of his concern for Israeli security while he was there indicated that the Israeli-Russian relationship was still close despite the sale of air defence missile systems to Syria (Katz, 2006:59). Indeed, the fact that Russia would not sell Syria the air defence missiles it apparently wanted most (*S-300*, *Iskander-E*, and *Igla*) due to the US and Israel’s objections indicated Russian sensitivity to Israeli security concerns and the extent to which Russia was willing to cooperate with Syria.

During Lavrov’s visit to Israel in October 2005 though, it became clear that Russia’s closer ties to Syria (as well as Iran) were increasingly straining Israeli-Russian relations. It was argued on the occasion that, “Several months ago, President Vladimir Putin promised the Israelis that he would press Syrian President Bashar Assad to expel Palestinian terrorist organizations from his country, and Israel was awaiting explanations of why that had not happened” (CDPSP,2006c: 4).

Role of *Hamas*

Hamas has the third major external challenge to the Israeli-Russian relations. Israel perceived *Hamas* as terrorist organization, because throughout it’s almost 20 year of existence (1988) *Hamas* has called for the destruction of Israel. *Hamas* came into power

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in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) election in 2006. *Hamas* has committed to the destruction of Israel and from the very beginning opted for violence to resolve the Arab-Israel conflict. It also did not accept the previous peace agreements between Israel and PNA. Russia does not, in contrast to the US, EU and Israel, regard *Hamas* as a terrorist organization. It was the only member of Quartet (United Nations, European Union and the US being the other three) which maintained formal contacts with *Hamas*. At the same time Russia saw the victory of *Hamas* in the Palestinian elections as a blow to the US policy and felt a dialogue with *Hamas* as a means of taking advantage of this setback for the US. It also saw it as an opportunity to increase its own influence amongst Arab countries hostile to the US. These different perspectives of Israel and Russia towards *Hamas* have impacted the Israeli-Russian relations.

The Russian invitation to *Hamas* leader Khaled Mashaal in early 2006 became a more controversial issue in the Israeli-Russian relations. The Minister of Construction and Education Meir Shitrit felt that Russia “has stabbed us in the back”. According to Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, “Victory in an election does not whitewash *Hamas* which is terrorist organization”.¹¹ Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said at a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Ivanov that “*Hamas* is our Chechnya. Just as the Chechen terrorists threaten you, we are threatened by *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*, and Al Qaeda threatens the whole world.” (CDPSP, 2006:17) Israel’s acting Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, called the Russian initiative “mistaken”. One Israeli government source stated that, “You can’t say you are a friend of Israel, that you are in favour of peace in the Middle East and at the same time give *Hamas* a clean bill of health” (Smith, 2006: 2). Israel was concerned that Russia’s decision to enter into a dialogue with *Hamas* could put an end to *Hamas*’s international isolation whilst it still refused to accept Israel’s right to exist.

However, both the US and Israel appeared reassured by the line that Russia took during the talks with *Hamas*. President Putin contacted Olmert by telephone in early March to

¹¹ And Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said at a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Ivanov, that ‘*Hamas* is our Chechnya. Just as the Chechen terrorists threaten you, we are threatened by *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*, and Al Qaeda threatens the whole world’, for details see, “Guest From *Hamas*” (2006), *The Current Digest of Post Soviet Press*, 58(7):17.

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brief him on the Russia-*Hamas* talks. Whilst Olmert thought Russia was making a mistake by entering into dialogue before it accepts the three demands of the Quartet, he appeared reassured that Putin would require *Hamas* to accept the three demands. Olmert stated:

Russian President Vladimir Putin relayed a clear, sharp, unmistakable message to me, saying: I support these three principles; I am true to these three principles. And I would like to add something that may have not been reported until now, which I believe to be of considerable importance. The Russian president further said: I told my friend Ariel Sharon, whom I admire and whom I wish recovery from the bottom of my heart, that Russia is forever obliged to never again harm the State of Israel. And now, the president said, I am passing my commitment to Ariel Sharon on to you as his successor, as the man who is carrying on his course (Smith, 2006:4)

Russia interpretation was different. When Russia's permanent representative to the UN Andrei Denisov was asked to comment on the invitation of Putin extended to *Hamas* leaders to visit Russia, he stated

Hamas's victory in the elections is a reality, and we have to accept it. To date we have not had any contacts with that organization. Contacts became possible only after it won democratic elections. At this juncture it's important to keep the door to dialogue open. But at the same time, Russia will tell *Hamas* leaders the following. First, they have to refrain from engaging in or sponsoring any terrorist activity in the future. Second, they need to recognize Israel as an independent state and as their neighbour and political partner. Third, *Hamas* must abandon its radical views and pursue a policy of working with the members of the Mideast quartet and with regional players, including Israel, to reach a peaceful, political settlement of the conflict (CDPSP, 2006:17).

Despite the differences, Israel was tried to maintain good relation with Russia. When Israeli Foreign Minster Livni met Russian President Vladimir Putin and her Russia

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counterpart, Sergei Lavrov in the summer of 2006, she told: "I was hesitant about coming to Russia at this particular time but I ultimately decided to make this important visit because Russia's role in this context could be very significant," (CDPSP, 2006b: 18). She was alluding to the current crisis, which arose after the abduction of an Israeli corporal, Gilad Shalit, who was taken hostage by Palestinians over a week ago.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has compared *Hamas* with Iran, arguing that both should not be isolated (Smith, 2006:5). There were both similarities and differences in Russian policy towards Iran and *Hamas*. Russia argued against an isolationist and punitive approach towards both, believing that this would be counterproductive, and force respective parties more intransigent. The Russian aim was to try to push both *Hamas* and Iran in a more accommodating direction. However, there was a greater divergence between Russian and Western interests over Iran. Whilst Russia did not favour the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, it opposed to any use of force or the imposition of sanctions against Iran. Russia has also opposed to prolonged American attempts to isolate Iran. At the end of the day Russia might prefer a nuclear armed Iran to an Iran that had been forcibly disarmed by the US, not least because Russia probably finds the expansion of American influence in the West Asia to be unacceptable. It should also be remembered that Russia has an interest in preventing the normalisation of US-Iranian relations, as US-Iranian tension increases Russia's value to Iran as a partner. Furthermore, any difficulties Iran may have in exporting its oil and gas would increase the importance of Russia as an energy supplier. Therefore, whilst Russia's differences with the Israel and the US over *Hamas* appeared virtually negligible, its differences over Iran may come to be more substantial.

One can argue that different strategic calculations of Israel and Russia towards the external actors (Iran, Syria, *Hamas* and US) complicate the relationship between both. Of the three Iran has emerged as the most critical external actor regarding Israeli-Russian relation. Israel maintained good relation with the pre-Islamic revolution regime of Iran. But the USSR did not enjoy much good relation with Iran because of the Iranian ties with the US. The Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 changed the entire nature of international politics. Suddenly, Israel and the US became enemies of Iran. The USSR started

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readjusting its relationship with Iran. The growing enmity between Israel (and the US) and Iran gave the advantage to the USSR (later Russia). The USSR started approaching to Iran in 1989 and improved its ties. After the end of Cold War Russia not only became the largest arms exporter to Iran but also a major player in the nuclear programme of Iran. Russian assistance to the Iranian nuclear programme became the biggest challenge to relations between Israel and Russia. Russia saw Iran as source revenue to stabilize economic crisis where as Israel perceived Iran as the threat of its national security in terms of Iranian financial and arms support to the militant groups like *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*. Israel was also suspicious regarding the credibility and purpose of Iranian nuclear programme. Therefore, one can argued that it was a clash between national security (Israel) and economic security (Russia).

Russia's relation with Syria has had also the same implication on the Israel and Russia relation. Israel did not have peace treaty with Syria and the latter had connection with Iran and Iranian originated *Hezbollah*. They pose great threat to the Israel security. On the other side, Russia saw the Syria as the second arms market after the Iran. *Hamas* which was established after the 1987 *Intifada* (uprising) had the ambition of the destruction of Israel. The victory of *Hamas* in the 2006 parliamentary election of Palestinian National Authority and the Russia's invitation to the leader of *Hamas* complicated the Israeli-Russian relation. Russia, in contrast to the Israel, the US and EU did not recognize *Hamas* as a terrorist organization. These two different approaches towards *Hamas* clouded political differences between the Israeli-Russian relations. Despite, these differences between Israel and Russia one must not underestimate the growing nature of Israeli-Russian relations in different field (political, economic and science technology) which was far higher than the Russia-Syria and Russia-Iran relations have.

Chapter IV

Russia's Role in Arab-Israel Peace Process

The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in 1991 and the drastic reduction in economic and military power resulted in a Russian retreat from West Asia, a region where the USSR was a significant player since the mid-1950s. The post Cold War Russian leadership has sought to regain its influence in the region. It perceived that Russian security was closely linked to the security of the West Asia. Any disturbance to the peace and stability of this region was seen to be undermining Russia's security, or damage its economic interests. Regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, Russia feels that, this conflict must be resolved to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region. In its view a fair solution to the conflict must include Israel returning the occupied territories to Arab countries, the creation of a Palestinian state, and security guarantees for every participant of the conflict, including Israel (Zakurtseva, 2007:109).

Historically, the USSR sought a political solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. In its view two factors prevented the Arab states from enforcing a military solution. One, the armies of Egypt and Syria were in no condition to successfully fight against the Israeli forces, and two, an attempt to eliminate Israel, or in Arab terms to "liberate" Palestine completely, would mean a world war, presumably because the Arabs could be successful in this only with the help of the Soviet Union and this in turn would inevitably bring in active US intervention on behalf of Israel (Stephen, 1973:5).

Traditionally, the USSR was supportive of the Palestinian cause. In November 1922, the Comintern Congress advocated support for potential allies in the anti-imperialist struggle and feudal aristocracy. (Stephen, 1971: 15-17). Despite the class origins of Palestinian leadership, from the very beginning, the USSR supported the Palestinian Arabs (Arnold Kramer, 1974:7). After the August 1929 uprising, the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) presented a highly critical and well-documented analysis of the socio-political situation in Palestine. It indicated that the goal of the Zionists activities was the expropriation of the Arab

peasants and colonization of these regions with Jews, the Arab workers, the Arab small businessmen and artisans and the strengthening of the Jewish capital (Kreutz, 2004, 4). In 1930, the Executive Committee of the Communist International described Zionism as “the expression of the exploiting, and great power oppressive strivings, of the Jewish bourgeoisie” (Spector, 1969:172).

Because of the severe domestic problems, and its international isolation in the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union was unable to offer any practical support for the Palestinians. In addition, the Communists destroyed the earlier Tsarist institutions and organizations, including the Palestinian Society with its networks of schools and clinics and they caused considerable damage to the local population. The World War II and its immediate aftermath deeply changed status of the USSR and the situation of West Asian in the international politics. The USSR emerged victorious in 1945 as one of the two new superpowers, and acquired a power it had previously lacked to exercise real influence in adjacent areas. At the same time the war brought to an end the long-standing West Asian stagnation which led to the social transformations and political movements of a nationalist and radical character (Kramer, 1974:9).

Immediately after the War, the USSR, in tune with erstwhile support for national liberation movements, and wanting to find a common ground with Arab national liberation movements, continued to support the Palestinians. As late as the spring of 1946, both the USSR and the West Asian Communist parties denounced the idea of partition of Palestine, and called instead for unified Arab-Jewish state. Hence, the Soviet support for the partition of Palestine in November 1947 was sudden. Some points become relevant for the shift. It was argued that the Soviet Union supported partition largely because it considered Arab governments and leaders in general to be tools of British imperialism. The anti-Soviet actions and statements of some Arab representatives certainly contributed to this opinion. According to the *Arab-Palestinian Daily, Filastin* (26 May 1947), “The Arab delegates, as well as the Arab High Executive representatives tried to avoid Soviet Union in the same was a healthy person avoids an itchy one... This made Soviet Union believe that the Arabs were attendant on the British (Kreutz, 2004:5-

6). The Holocaust in Eastern and Central Europe, and the support the Soviet Union received during the war against Nazism from far-flung Jewish Diaspora, undoubtedly had an impact on Soviet leaders. In the famous speech on 26 November 1947, Andrei Gromyko, the Foreign Minister of the USSR, pointed out that “the Jewish people had been closely linked with Palestine for a considerable period in history. We must also not overlook the position in which the Jewish people found themselves as a result of the recent world war.” He went on to say that “the solution of the Palestinian problem into two separate states will be of profound historical significance, because this decision will meet the legitimate demands of the Jewish people.”(Bentsur, 2000:243). In subsequent years Soviet policy makers argued that “when the USSR voted in favour of the establishment of the State of Israel, it voted on the basis of the right to self-determination, not to implement a colonialist scheme.” (Special Document, 1972: 200).

While the supporting the partition of Palestine, the USSR wanted it to be implemented fully, including the creation of the Arab-Palestinian state and the internationalization of Jerusalem. In his same speech 26 November, 1947, Gromyko indicated, “the USSR supported the partition as the only practical solution in view of the inability of the Jewish and Arab people to live together”, and “although the partition solution seemed to favour the Jew it neither contradicted Arab national interest, nor was it intended as an anti-Arab move.” (Bentsure, 2000:244). On 3 December 1948, while the supporting Israel’s application for United Nation Membership, Yacob Malik, the Soviet representative to the UN Security Council, said that the USSR “would give the same attention to an application for admission to the UN, submitted by an Arab State set up on the territory of Palestine, as provide in the resolution of 29 November 1947” (Yaacov, 1974:65-66). He added, “Unfortunately owing to a series of circumstances, such a state has not yet been created” (Kreutz, 2007:48).

On 11 December 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 194 (III) co-sponsor by the Soviet Union. Among others it’s called for the right of Palestine refugees to return to their home or to be paid compensation. It stated that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so

at the earliest practicable date, and compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made by the governments or authorities responsible" (UN Resolution, 194). At least until the fall 1949, the USSR called for the creation of an Arab-Palestinian state and in an unusual alliance with the Vatican, asked for the internationalization of Jerusalem (Golan, 1990:42). However, the Soviet advocacy of Palestinian rights to lost land and properties were argued along individual basis, without mentioning the Palestinian's right national self-determination. Following the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, the USSR started to see Palestinian Arabs mainly as refugees and the Arab-Israeli conflict was depicted within the interstate dimensions between the State of Israel and its Arab neighbours (Golan, 1988:9).

From the 1950, the Arab-Israeli conflict became entangled in the global rivalry between the US and the USSR. By the early 1950s the Soviet policy clearly shifted toward the Arabs. According to mainstream interpretations, the active Soviet support for the Arabs in the form of the Czech arms deal in 1955 introduced the Cold War into the Arab-Israeli conflict and created a potential superpower confrontation. However, others suggest that the converse was the case: it was the Cold War that brought the USSR into the West Asia and led to direct Soviet support for the Arabs in their conflict with Israel (Slater, 1990:557). One of the first steps in this process was the unsuccessful Israeli decision to seek arms from the US in early 1950s. Though the latter declined direct involvement, it facilitated the Israeli acquisition of arms from Britain and France. Several months later, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion decided to support the West in the Korean War and to abandon the policy of non-identification.¹ Both of these decisions provoked angry denunciation from the USSR.

It was argued that the USSR sought to exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict to drive the West from the West Asia and secure its own domination. From this perspective, Soviet ambitions were antithetical to the prospects for a settlement of the conflict that would

¹For details see, Safran Nadav (1981), *Israel, the Embattled Ally*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, pp.338-340.

protect the legitimated security interests of Israel, America's principal regional ally. For these reasons the US ignored various Soviet proposals for mutual superpower disengagement from the West Asia and sought to exclude the USSR from diplomatic efforts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict (Slater, 1990:558).

As many scholars have noted, there are two theories concerning the Soviet policy regarding Arab-Israeli conflict (Herrmann, 1987:417). The dominant one and the one on which America's policies were based was that Soviet policies reflected radically expansionist objectives. The minority view was that the Soviet policy was part of a long term strategy of global expansionism, motivated by a combination revolutionary ideology and traditional Russian imperialism and expansionism, especially along Russia's southern periphery. Taking advantage of the post-World War II "vacuum" left by the decline of western power and the resulting political instability in the West Asia, the Soviets, the argument went, tactically aligned themselves with the emerging radical, nationalist, anti-colonialist forces in the area and used the Arab-Israeli conflict as a means of penetrating the West Asia (Slater, 1990:559).

However, the Soviet policy towards the Palestine movement, especially towards the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and *Fatah*², for long time, remained cool and cautious (Golan, 1980:6-7). The USSR condemned the use of terrorism and the hijacking of civilian planes by the *fedayeens*, arguing that Arab reactionaries and Israeli agents were deliberately pushing the Palestinians towards extremism, to create an international public perception that the Arab partitions were only fanatical terrorists (Norton, 1972:237). It also criticized the unrealistic aims of these organizations, which amounted to the liquidation of the State of Israel. The Soviets believed "the existence of Israel is a fact. The idea of annihilating it as a way of achieving self-determination for the Palestinian Arab people is self-contradictory; this can only cause a new world war" (Special Document, 1972: 200).

²R. D. McLaurin indicates that "the PLO must be viewed as having two origins" (The PLO and the Arab Fertile Crescent), in A.R. Norton and M.H. Greenberg (1989), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press p.14.

Following the June 1967 war, the Soviets followed a dual-track policy regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first track was the rebuilding of the Egyptian and Syrian armed forces so that they would be capable of deterring or defending themselves against an Israeli attack. This would also enable them to negotiate from a position of strength rather than accept a settlement imposed upon them. At the same time, however, the Arab States were denied the level and kind of offensive military capabilities, especially surface-to-surface missiles and modern fighter bombers that would have tempted them into an attack Israel, particularly within its pre-1967 borders. Moreover, the Soviet advisers and technicians that were stationed in Egypt and Syria after 1967 retained operational control over indigenous military forces.³

The second track emphasized on a negotiate settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the outset of its alliance with Egypt and Syria in the 1950s, the Soviets had refused to countenance the elimination of Israel and repeatedly had made that clear to link these countries (Talbot, 1974: 345). Moreover, during that period the Soviets made several proposals for the neutralization and demilitarization of the West Asia that had been ignored by the West.⁴

In May 1967, Nasser reinstated the maritime blockade of Eilat, Israel's only port on the Red Sea that eventually led to the June war. In the course of six days of fighting, Israel captured Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. When the Israeli forces reached the Suez Canal and were advancing on the Syrian front the USSR turned from rhetorical support to verbal threats. Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin warned American President Lyndon Johnson that the USSR would intervene militarily unless the US immediately stopped the advance of the Israeli forces in Syria. Kosygin claimed that the fighting in Syria, which was geographically closer to the USSR, affected the vital interests of the peoples of the USSR. President Johnson was less impressed by

³For details see, Halliday, Fred (1981), "The Arc of Crisis and the New Cold War", *MERIP Report*, 100-101: 14-25, Special Anniversary Issue (Oct.-Dec.).

⁴However, the near catastrophe of the 1967 war clearly impressed upon the USSR the necessity for renewed effort for a political settlement. So even as the Soviets moved to rebuild the Egyptian army, they began pressuring Nasser to accept the existence of Israel and to negotiate an end to the conflict, Ilana Kass (1978), *Soviet Involvement in the Middle East*, Boulder: Colo.: Westview, 1978, pp.50

Kosygin's military threat than by its political consequences. Johnson urged Israel to announce that it would observe a complete cease-fire (Rafael, 1985-86:565). Amidst the war, the Soviets also broke off diplomatic ties with Israel.

For a brief period after the 1967 war, it appeared that a settlement might be at hand as interests of the superpowers appeared to be converging (Saunders, 1988:552). During the early fall, the US and the Soviet negotiator reached an agreement on the basic principles for a settlement, which would be negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations. In November 1967 these principles were incorporated in the Security Council in Resolution 242, which has been supported by the USSR and has remained the basic framework for a peace settlement ever since. The Resolution 242 called for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the West Asia based on the following Principles. First, withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories captured during the recent conflict. Second, the termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force. Third, the just settlements of the refugee problem and finally, the guaranteeing of the territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area, through measures such as demilitarized zones (UN Resolution 242).

In other words, the superpower framework called for land-for-peace formula or Israeli withdrawal from territories it captured in the 1967 war in exchange for an internationally guaranteed peace. Moreover, the Palestinian question was treated only as a refugee problem rather than one of self-determination, and there was no mention of the creation of Palestinian state. The significance of 242 should not be underestimated. As Alfred Atherton, a former State Department official who participated in the 1967 negotiations has remarked, 242 represented a clear cut Soviet commitment to settlement under which the Arabs would for the first time recognize Israel's right to exist (Atherton, 1985: 692).

During the Security Council deliberation the USSR proposed to include a clause requiring Israel to withdraw to the pre-war lines of 5 June, 1967 but this language was

rejected. The very fact that the Soviet delegation sought to modify the British draft was a further indication that the Soviets were concerned that the British text did not required a full Israeli withdrawal. Indeed, after Resolution 242 was adopted, the Soviet Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetso admitted that there was certainly much scope for different interpretations that would entail Israel the right to establish new boundaries and to withdraw its troops only so far as the lines it judged convenient (Rosenne, 2005: 40).

However, initially both the Arabs and the Israelis in effect rejected 242. Syria and Egypt joined with other Arab states at the Khartoum summit conference in September 1967 that in principle accepted the necessity for a political settlement but rejected recognition and formal peace with Israel or even direct negotiations with it. At the same time Israeli policy, which for a brief period of time after the June war had been based on the principle of exchanging the conquered land in return for real peace, also changed; Israel began moving toward consolidating its control over the occupied territories. As neither superpower was willing to make economic and military assistance to their respective clients dependent on their agreeing to the principles of 242, the peace effort foundered (Slater, 1990-91:569).

In January 1968 the Soviets presented a peace plan based on UN 242. It included a call for Israeli withdrawal over a two month period, end of the state of war, creation of demilitarized zones, and a resolution of the refugee problem (Klinghoffer, 1985: 63). There was little American or Israeli interest, and at about the same time the US began the delivery of 68 *Phaltom* jets to Israel. In late 1968 the USSR again resumed its diplomatic efforts towards a settlement, presenting a proposal to the incoming Nixon administration for the implementation of 242. The proposal clearly sought to meet some of Israel's security concerns and made some concessions toward Israel's insistence on direct negotiation. It called for contacts among the belligerents to discuss the details of a settlement, included provision for the creation of demilitarized zones along Israel's borders, indefinite stationing of UN peacekeeping forces in those areas, and introduced the idea of a formal superpower commitment to and guarantee of the settlement

(Breslauer, 1990: 72-73). However, the termination of diplomatic relation between Israel and Soviet Union in June 1967 largely hampered the diplomatic efforts of the USSR.

In the next few months there were persistent Soviet approaches to start a dialogue with the US towards advancing an Arab-Israeli settlement (Saunders, 1988:55). The Soviets made further concessions. They agreed to support direct negotiations between Israel and its adversaries; Israel forces would not be required to withdraw from the occupied territories before an overall comprehensive settlement was in place; Palestinian refugees might be resettled with compensation in Arab countries, rather than returned to Israel; and the USSR would bring pressures on its Arab allies to accept this framework (Whetten, 1974:75-76).

In Nixon administration was sharply divided on how to respond to the Soviet proposals. Many in the State Department, including Secretary of State William Rogers, considered the proposals to be serious and accepted the unavailability of a Soviet role in a political settlement. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, however, did not share such an optimism and the Soviet position in his judgment was one-sided and favoured the Arabs and offered "no hint of possible compromise, amounted to blanket support of the hard-line Arabs and as such was an obvious nonstarter" (Kissinger, 1982:600).

On the other hand, Rogers and the State Department wanted to explore the Soviet proposals, so Kissinger rather cynically allowed them to proceed, but without the intention of following through. Interestingly, the State Department continued its discussions with the USSR and in November 1969 presented the Rogers Plan to Israel, Egypt, and the USSR. The proposal called for UN-mediated talks between Israel and Egypt to negotiate an agreement based on the following principles: the establishment of a timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egyptian territory occupied in 1967; an official end to the state of war between Egypt and Israel; establishment of secure and recognized borders, creation of demilitarized zones along the frontier; Israeli freedom of navigation in the Strait of Tiran and the Suez Canal; a "fair settlement of the refugee problem", and mutual recognition by Israel and Egypt of "each other's sovereignty,

political independence, and the right to live in peace within secure boundaries free from threats of force" (Quandt, 1977: 89-90).

There was a close similarity between the Roger Plan and the Soviet position, which had been made public in July 1969. The major difference was that the Rogers Plan applied primarily to the conflict between Israel and Egypt over the Sinai, while the Soviet proposals extended the same principles to the Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Roger Plan clearly had been formulated to maximize the chances of Israeli acceptance; nonetheless, the Israelis quickly rejected it. Shortly afterward Egypt followed suit, insisting on an unconditional Israeli withdrawal and no direct negotiations with Israel (Aronson, 1978: 113).

Since the 1970s, however, the dominant position among academic has been that while Soviet policy was basically expansionist, it was cautious, pragmatic and to a considerable extent reactive rather than planned. On the one hand, the Soviet Union recognized the value of the Arab-Israeli conflict in eliminating western influence and expanding their own. But on the other hand, after 1967 they feared the potential of Arab-Israeli wars to precipitate into an unwanted confrontation with the US. Therefore, while the Soviet Union took advantage of opportunities when they presented themselves and sought to "probe for soft spots" in the West Asia, it avoided direct attacks on vital western interests. Its preferred scenario for the Arab-Israeli conflict was to keep the pot boiling while ensuring that it did not boil over and to maintain a prolonged stalemate (Aspaturian, 1983). Interpreting the Soviet policy, some western diplomats believed that the Soviet Union preferred to maintain this state of "no war, no peace" in the West Asia (Stephens, 1973: 4).

The alternative or minority theory of Soviet behaviour was that it was best explained not in terms of expansionist objectives, whether motivated by ideological/revolutionary goals or those of traditional Russian imperialism, whether planned or reactive, whether reckless or cautious. Rather, it is proposed, that the Soviet behaviour in the West Asia from World War II until Gorbachev, can be explained in terms of a combination of traditional

defensive concerns, ongoing dynamic of the Cold War, geo-strategic rivalry with the US , and Soviet aspirations to be recognized and accepted as a superpower equal in influence and prestige to the US.⁵

As far as the Palestinian resistance was concerned, the Soviet Union perceived it as legitimate and justified so long as it was directed against Israeli military, but unacceptable if it used methods such as the hijacking of civilian planes. For the Soviet Union the notion of creating a unified Palestinian state replacing Israel was not acceptable on both ideological and practical grounds. The USSR recognizes Israel's existence as a fact, and one which cannot be changed by military means. The possibility of changes lays not in the destruction of the Israeli state, but in a change in its character, through the replacement of the national struggle by the class struggle. It was in this context that the USSR advised to the Palestinians to pursue their claim to self-determination (Stephen, 1973:5).

In the absence of progress on the diplomatic front, Egypt and Syria prepared for a new round of fighting, while Israel lulled itself into believing the durability of the status quo. Misinterpreting President Anwar el-Sadat's intention in evicting the Soviet military adviser corps in 1972, Israel felt strengthened. Sadat, however, had evicted the Soviets to avoid a possible confrontation of American and Soviet armed forces on Egyptian soil in the war for which he was preparing (Rafael, 1985-86:565).

In October 1973, on the day of Yom Kippur, the armies of Egypt and Syria simultaneously attacked Israel. After initial setbacks the Israeli army advanced beyond the lines it had held before the beginning of the hostilities. In the absence of an agreement by the warring states to end the fighting, and without consulting them, the Soviet Union invited Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for urgent deliberations in Moscow. The

⁵ The most important works in this area include L. Carl Brown (1984), *International Politics and the Middle East*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, Breslauer W. George (1983), "Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967-1972: Unalterable Antagonism or Collaborative Competition?" in George W. Breslauer, ed., *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, Boston: Unwin Hyman ,pp.23-60, Breslauer (1990), "On Collaborative Competition" in George W. Breslauer, ed., *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, Boston: Unwin Hyman.

outcome of their discussions was the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 338, ordering an instantaneous cease-fire and the immediate opening of direct peace negotiation between the parties under appropriate auspices (Rafael, 1985-86:565). The USSR's concern was to save its Arab allied from a resounding defeat. Kissinger's considerations, however, seemed to be more complex. He aspired to snatch from the jaws of war a victory for peace, assuming that both sides were sobered by the recognition of the limitations of their military power.

Like all other previous Arab-Israel wars, the October War ended by joint action of the two superpowers when they were facing the danger of a confrontation. On 26 October 1973, the day after the fighting had finally ceased, President Nixon stated in a press conference that the US and the USSR had different objectives in the West Asia, but agreed that it was not in their interest to have a confrontation which might lead to a nuclear confrontation. With the growing scope and severity of the wars, the risk superpower involved increased constantly (Rafael, 1985-86:565).

The Soviet Union was displeased at its exclusion from the US mediated peace between Israel and Egypt. After the signing of the peace treaty between Israel-Egypt in Camp David in September 1978, the President Leonid Brezhnev declared that "there is only one road" to a real settlement, "the road of full liberation of all Arab lands occupied by Israel in 1967 and of full and unambiguous respect for the lawful rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including the right to create their own independent state." At the end of Yasser Arafat's visit to Moscow, in late October 1978, the Soviet Union finally recognized the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." (Kreutz, 2004: 12)

Israel's military intervention in Lebanon in June 1982, to which the US initially reacted mildly and while the USSR watched with relative restraint, soon reached the superpower plateau when the Israeli army administered heavy defeats on land and in the air to the Soviet-equipped Syrian forces stationed in eastern Lebanon. On 9 June 1982, Leonid Brezhnev intervened sharply with President Ronald Reagan, warning him that further Israeli attacks against Syria would have global implications, the Soviet code phrase for a

threat of active intervention (Haig, 1984:339-40) Without engaging the Soviet government with further arguments, Reagan hastened to convey the text of the Soviet warning to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, adding his own summons to halt the fighting immediately and unconditionally. The Israeli government was surprised by this harsh US demand, since it had acted in the belief of US benign understanding. After a brief and unsuccessful attempt to gain reprieve, Begin complied in the Arab demands (Rafael, 1985-86: 565). It was the first cease-fire in the more than thirty years of Arab-Israel conflict established by decreed by the USSR and unreservedly endorsed by the US. But soon the Israeli forces renewed their advance, climaxing in the occupation of Beirut. The USSR, which had watch the collapse of the cease-fire with unusual equanimity, manifested pronounced restlessness when the American marines forces arrived in Lebanon an area proximate to southern borders of the USSR. (Rafael, 1985-86: 565).

Meanwhile in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev brought a marked change into the traditional tenets of Soviet foreign policy through his reform programme with 'new thinking foreign policy.' The changes designed by him and articulated effectively by his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze had a theoretical and practical content. The basic tenet was a de-ideologization (Chenoy, 2001:237). The message was that the USSR wanted to become a normal state integrated with the rest of Europe. That it was weary fighting the battle against imperialism and taking on the responsibility of the Third World. Gorbachev's basic foreign policy priorities include the Soviet withdrawal from East Europe, talks on strategic and arms control and reduction of nuclear forces, an increase in multilateral relations with the West, reduction in military aid to the Third World countries, and with withdrawal from specific regional conflicts such as Afghanistan. (Chenoy, 2001: 238).

The Third World nations, including those in Arab World, were only of peripheral interest and importance to Gorbachev. His West Asian policy was aimed towards the major goal of opening the USSR to the West, especially to the US and to bring about both an end to the Cold War with the American superpower and an alleviation of Soviet economic problems. Towards this end, Gorbachev and his advisor wanted to restore the Soviet-Israeli relations (which were broken after the June War 1967) and to limit erstwhile

Soviet support for Arab national cause (Kreutz, 2007: 51). The Palestinian objections notwithstanding, Gorbachev's policy would be continued by the USSR's successor state, the Russian Federation, whose president, Yeltsin, and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, did not want to endanger "their close relationship with the United States by adopting anything different from the positions advocated by Washington" (Golan, 1997: 133).

Russia Policy towards Arab-Israel Peace Process

After the disintegration of the USSR, the newly formed Russian Federation experienced drastic changes at the domestic as well as international level. Domestically, it was experimented the shock therapy to transform its socialist economy into the capitalist economy. Internationally, it suddenly declined to be a major power from the superpower status. In view of its new boundaries, Russian geopolitical interest shifted more to the Northern Tier countries of the West Asian such as Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. According to many observers, "the most distant parts of the region, including Levant, remain of considerably less strategic and economic interest for Russia" (Dannreuther, 1998: 351). With its transition into capitalism in charting its foreign policy, Russia wanted to make a systemic and foundational break with its past. The Russian policy makers rejected theories of imperialism that had been the basis of Soviet foreign policy, shunned contradictions with the West and abandoned beliefs on Russia's natural alliance with the Third World. The new and pragmatic foreign policy decided to accept "realism as its creed and located itself as a normal state within the European Union with similar aspirations both for its people and state" (Chenoy, 2001:237).

A debate between those who advocated 'Atlanticism' or 'Westerner' (those who supported the western oriented foreign policy) and those who believed in 'Eurasianism' (those who supported the European and Asian centric foreign policy) as the basic concept of Russia foreign policy ensued. Yet in the first few years of existence the continuities with its Soviet past emerged, this time as a manifestation of national interest rather than ideology. The Russian foreign policy has passed through distinct phases and swung between differing paradigms to redefine its national interest and role in a changed international political system (Chenoy, 2001: 237).

Despite these problems, the Russian foreign policy elite have wanted to preserve a modicum of Russian presence in the Arab-Israel conflict. Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin and his first Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev tilted in favour of the Atlanticists (Chenoy, 2001: 239). In his view, the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, indicated that while Russia wanted to cooperate closely with US, "it is now evident that the efforts by one co-sponsor are not enough to give dynamism to the process. More than five years later, one of Kozyrev's successors, Igor Ivanov, added that Russia, being a co-sponsor of a West Asian settlement, bears political, moral, and historical responsibility for the peace process in the Holy Land" (Kreutz, 2007:53). At the same time, the Palestinian issue has been relegated to a peripheral status in Russian foreign policy thinking, even among centrist nationalist circles. Russia's support for policy towards the Palestinians was extremely cautious, even at the time of Primakov's leadership (Nizameddin, 1999:155)

Russia's policy towards Arab-Israel conflict can be examined in three stages. The first stage was from 1992 to 1994/5. In this stage, Russia's policy was almost a total withdrawal and passive acceptance of the US and Israeli positions in the Arab-Israeli conflict when Andrei Kozyrev was the Russian Foreign Minister. This stage was characterized by President Yeltsin as a time of "extreme timidity towards the West, whilst allowing relations with the Third World to weaken" (el-Daufani, 1993:106). The second stage was of a "national consensus", led and symbolized by Yevgeny Primakov, first as Russian Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister, which included some renewed but limited and mainly verbal support for the Palestinians. The third stage, from 2000 to 2006, was shown as Putin's period of increased cooperation with Israel and a new departure from pro-Arab policy.

Its position as co-chairman (along with US) of the Madrid process, which began in 1991, gave Russia an official role in the attempts to reach a settlement. Its weakness has meant that the US has played the leading role to promote a peace process in the region (Smith, 2002:1). The Madrid Conference was hosted by government of Spain and co-sponsored

by the US and the USSR. It convened on 30 October 1991 and lasted for three days. It was an early attempt by the international community to start a peace process through negotiations involving Israel and the Arab countries including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, US President George H.W. Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker formulated the framework of objectives, and together with the USSR extended a letter of invitation to Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. The Soviets went as far as to accept the United and Israeli request to exclude the PLO, the Palestinians from East Jerusalem, and the Palestinian Diasporas from the conference.

The Yeltsin Period 1992-1999

As the post-Madrid the multilateral talks began in Moscow on 28 January 1992, Yeltsin and his advisors allowed the Israelis to “control the entire agenda of the talks” (el-Daufani, 1994: 866). In his inaugural address, President Yeltsin did not mention either Palestinian rights or the Israeli Occupation. Instead, the USSR’s affirmed goals were “to continue active efforts to promote the Arab-Israel Peace process and to make full use of its opportunities as co-sponsor to ensure a historic compromise between the Arabs and the Israeli.” This was completely in accordance with American demands and reduced Russia’s role to one, which was largely subservient (Kreutz, 2004:20).

Similarly, Russia’s role in the PLO-Israel “Declaration of Principles” (DOP) 13 September 1993 was limited. Although , Victor Posuvalyuk, special envoy to the West Asia, claimed that “Russian diplomats not only knew about the secret meeting in Oslo, but also actively promoted its successful outcome.” (CDPSP, 1994a: 28) After the PLO-Israel agreement was initiated on 20 August 1993, the PLO representative, Abu Mazen, left for Moscow to inform the Russian government. Russia assured him full Russian approval and cooperation. On 6 September 1993, Posuvalyuk was sent to Syria and Jordan to shore up support for the agreement). After DOP was reformulated, the ensuing discussion focused on Russian foreign policy and the international status of post-Soviet Russia. A struggle existed between pro-Western, neo-liberal Atlanticists and an informal coalition of nationalist-minded political forces who advocated an independent Russian

foreign policy. The latter group complained bitterly that although Russia remained a cosponsor of the West Asian peace process it was marginalized by the US.

Nevertheless, Russia soon tried to reassert its role in the peace process and its influence in the West Asia. Domestic and international forces stimulated its effort towards a more active Russian engagement. On the domestic front, after the December 1993 parliamentary elections President Yeltsin wanted to appease the outspoken critics of his pro-Western and pro-Israeli policy and to work out a practical arrangement with the new parliament. To this end, he adopted a more independent, nationalist line in his foreign policy. In the international arena, Russian leaders were deeply disappointed by the lack of Western economic assistance and political cooperation and began to look for alternative economic and political partners. The West Asia once again became more important to Russia. Although the post-Soviet leaders could not have supported the Palestinians as much as the USSR had, they still wanted to bring the Palestinian issue back to the fore in order to gain a more important role among the Arab states and to have an impact on the West. At the beginning of 1994, Foreign Minister Kozyrev promoted the Arab-Israeli peace, stating that the "realization of Palestinian aspirations was the main goals of Russia's West Asian Policy."(Kreutz, 2004: 21)

The first practical example of this new Russian involvement followed the 25 February 1994, massacre of Palestinians worshippers in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron by an Israeli settler. The Russian reaction to the massacre was cautious and balanced in tone. It noted the condemnation of the mass killings by the Israeli government, but indicated that this did not absolve the Israeli leadership from full responsibility. In addition, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 2 March 1994, calling for a reconvening of the Madrid Peace Conference, to revive and save the Arab-Israeli Peace process. Russia also supported the Palestinian request for international observers to be sent to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to protect the local population from further Israeli acts of violence (CDPSP, 1994:22). Both Victor Posuvalyuk, the Russian President's special envoy to the West Asia and the Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov were sent to the West Asia to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict through shuttle diplomacy. In response to a question on fundamental principles for restoring the peace process, Posuvalyuk stressed

that Russian policy proceeded from the need to preserve the 'Gaza and Jericho first' agreement and the Declaration on the Principles between the PLO and Israel, as the foundation of the negotiating process (CDPSP, 1994a: 28). Between, 11-12 March 1994, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev also visited Israel and Tunis to discuss the tragic events with Israeli and Palestinian officials (CDPSP, 1994: 22). While summing up his trip Kozyrev said that "the most important task today in efforts to reach a Middle East Settlement is the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution as quickly as possible" (CDPSP, 1994b: 26). However, the American and Israeli reactions to the Russian initiative were quite negative because it was independent in nature.⁶

The Russian opposition and the Arab World welcomed these initiatives, and Kozyrev claimed that his West Asian diplomacy was an example of the partnership between the two powers. (CDPSP, 1994b: 26). The American response was different. The US Secretary of State Warren Christopher sent a letter to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat warning him to stop trying to make separate deals with Russian diplomats. Since the US and Israel only had harsh words for Andrei Kozyrev's trip to Tunisia and disregarded Russia's sudden claim to genuine, not pro-forma equality in the West Asian Peace Process, Russia had to abandon its proposals and accept its diminished role in the balance of power (Kreutz, 2004: 24). However, this did not mean an end to its activist foreign policy or a total withdrawal from the Levant. In fact, just one month later, in April 1994, Russia hosted PLO leader Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Arafat's visit to Russia during 18- 20 April, 1994 marked an important change in Russia's role in Arab-Israel Peace Process. Arafat spoke highly of Russia's contribution to the Arab-Israeli dialogue and expressed gratitude for the Russian help. He reiterated the previous requests of the PLO that Russian soldiers become part of an international force that should be sent to the occupied territories. The Russian reply was friendly but cautious. Arafat was promised some help to organize Palestinian police units and Yeltsin stated that the establishment of a general and just peace in the West Asia continued to

⁶ For details see, Golan Galia (1997), "Moscow and the PLO: The Ups and Downs of a Complex Relationship," in A. Sela and M. Ma'oz, eds., *The PLO and Israel: From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p.135

remain a strategic priority for Russian. This statement was stronger than any of earlier declarations since the Gorbachev's rise to power (Kreutz, 2004: 25).

Between 24 and 27 April 1994 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Russia. This was the first official visit of an Israeli Prime Minister and he was welcomed with ceremony and cordiality. Both parties stressed the need for further efforts towards a lasting settlement on the Arab-Israeli conflict. There were, however, two points of potential disagreement. Rabin complained about the involvement of Russia in the peace process without coordination with the Americans.⁷ In response Kosyrev claimed that Russia acted in complete accordance with the US, and Yeltsin promised Rabin that only defensive weapons and spare parts would be delivered to Syria (Kreutz, 2007:57).

In late 1994 Russia's UN representative, Sergei Lavrov submitted a draft to the UN General Assembly under the title, "The Middle East Peace Process". His goal was to shore up the gains that were achieved already and to promote further practical progress on all tracks of the negotiations. As Ambassador, Lavrov stressed, Russia stood for a complete and just solution to all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, without prejudice to any of the side. The proposal was accepted by the UN General Assembly on 16 December 1994, and the Russian delegation indicated that "the achievement of a full, just, and lasting settlement in the West Asian is one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy" (Kreutz, 2004: 25):

Yevgeny Primakov served as Russian Foreign Minister from January 1996 to September 1998 and was Prime Minister until May 1999. He was the most knowledgeable international statesman of the period who was personally involved in the Palestinian question and had long personal ties with Yasser Arafat and many other Arab leaders. Although Primakov's formal tenure at the Foreign Ministry and Prime Ministerial offices lasted less than three and a half years, his name was synonymous with the period between 1995 and 2000. His rise to power was warmly welcomed by both Palestinians and other Arab leaders. For example when Yasser Arafat, was interviewed in June 1996 he stressed that "he had known Primakov for twenty Years, that Primakov speaks Arabic fluently,

⁷ Another was the Russian arms sales to countries hostile to Israel such as Syria and Iran.

and was familiar with all the Palestinian leadership.” (Nizameddin, 1999: 154). The Arabs reactions contrasted sharply with Western, particularly American and Israeli opinions, which had been predominantly critical or even outwardly hostile to Primakov’s appointment and his role in high politics (Kreutz, 2007:58).

Soon after his appointment as Russian Foreign Minister in January 1996, Primakov expressed the view that up until that time, Russia had been playing a minimal part in the peace process, inadequate to its potential and that he intended to make Russia play a more active role. As a consequence, in April 1996, he visited Israel, Lebanon, and Syria in an effort to moderate the Israeli-Lebanese crisis. In that endeavour, according to Russian diplomatic sources, he acted in cooperation with France, Italy, the European Union, though) with less cooperation with the US. His meeting on 22 April 1996 with Prime Minister Shimon Peres was particularly difficult and according to Primakov, his host told him that Israel needed only one intermediary with the Arabs and that only the US should play that role (Kreutz, 2004: 28). Despite his goal to prove that Russia was once more a factor in West Asian and global politics, Primakov operated against a background of a very weak Russian State and civil society, and without the necessary military and economic muscle to support his diplomatic efforts (Freedman, 1998: 7).

Primakov rejected the American-Israeli opinion that the “no war, no peace” situation can exist indefinitely as a means of consolidating the existing territorial status quo in the West Asia, and that Israeli military superiority would force the Arabs to submit to Israeli dictate. Primakov thought that because of the deep antagonism between the parties involved, no West Asian settlement would be possible without active intervention from outside. In his view, the only way out of the conflict was compromise, achieved by an Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories that had been occupied since the June War in exchange for peace and the establishment of full diplomatic and other relations ((Kreutz, 2007: 59).

In late September 1997 experts started to prepare for Primakov’s next visit to the West Asia to meet the region’s political leaders in view of the unsatisfactory situation in the peace process. The spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Valeri Nesterushkin

anticipated that it would have been hard to reach an agreement on the resumption of Arab-Israeli peace talks without Russia's active assistance and participation. He recalled that an agreement which had just been concluded between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levi and PLO representative Mahmoud Abbas, had taken almost six months of minute political and diplomatic work, first of all by co-sponsors of the Arab-Israel peace process, Russia and the US (Kreutz, 2004: 39). In practice, Russia had to recognize the major American role in Arab-Israeli relations, but was determined not to be completely excluded, and to retain for itself a meaningful role in the peace process (Blank, 1996: 8).

On 24 October 1997, Primakov left for his visit to West Asia as Russian Foreign Minister. On this trip Primakov met Prime Minister Netanyahu and at Netanyahu's request Primakov visited Syria twice to reassure the Israelis of Syrian intentions. During his meeting with Arafat in Ramallah he promised that Russia would recognize a Palestinian state as soon as it was proclaimed. Later, while in Egypt, he asserted that the present deadlock in the West Asian Peace Process was a result of the Israeli government not implementing agreements and understandings concluded by the previous government. Blaming Netanyahu's policies, Primakov issued "a twelve-point draft, Code of Peace and Security in the Middle East" (Kreutz, 2007:63). Two of points claimed that there can be no forward movement towards a West Asian Peace settlement unless each country complied with the agreements it has concluded with its neighbours and that the Peace Process makes progress only on condition that there is movement on all three tracks , namely Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Syrian , and Israeli-Lebanese.

In practice, Russian policy towards the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict was cautious because it did not want to antagonize either Israel or the US. The support for Palestinian rights tended to be minimal. Russia's political and economic crisis continued and, consequently, its West Asian policy reflected the growing weakness of the country. In August 1998, the economic situation in Russia sharply deteriorated once again and Yeltsin was compelled to ask Primakov to form a new government. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's reaction to the Russian predicament was somewhat sympathetic especially regarding the Russian economic situation.

In early October 1998 Arafat came to Russia shortly after Primakov's promotion as a Prime Minister. He was assured by the new Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov of Russia's support for Palestinian independent statehood, while not compromising the national interests of Israel, particularly in the realm of security. Arafat lobbied for increasing Russia's active involvement in the region and asked it to take part in the trilateral American-Palestinian-Israeli meeting that was then set for 15 October 1998 in Washington. The Russian leaders were not in a position to give him a positive answer. A weakened Russia was obviously unable to challenge the US and the most that the Russian leaders could do was to wish Arafat a "successful visit" and reappoint a permanent envoy to deal with the West Asian issues who would pay regular visits to the region (CDPSP, 1998: 21).

Russian stand towards the possible proclamation of an independent Palestinian State was not positive. The position presented by Foreign Minister Ivanov recognized the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of the independent nation. Nevertheless, Russia advised to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to extend the duration of the transition period in its relations with Israel, and not to proclaim the Palestinian state now. This position suited Israeli interests and was gladly accepted by Israeli Foreign Minister Sharon, who went to Russia on 12 April 1999. Sharon welcomed the idea of the prolongation and added that according to Israeli views, it was not necessary to impose deadlines on the Arab-Israeli talks (Kreutz, 2007:66).

On 4 May 1999, Palestinian independence was not proclaimed, as Arafat had indicated earlier. On 12 May 1999, Yeltsin dismissed Primakov from the Prime Ministerial post and his formal role in high politics came to an end. However, Yeltsin's foreign policy was continued for about one more year until his successor, Vladimir Putin, began to introduce his own ideas. On the Palestinian issue, Primakove combined verbal support for Palestinian and Arab rights with very careful practical steps while bearing in mind that the relations with Israel and the US were vital for Russia. For that reason he sought to coordinate his own diplomacy and peace-making efforts with those of the European states-especially France and as far as possible, the US.

The Putin Period 2000-2006

President Vladimir Putin represented a new generation of Russian leaders. Almost thirty years younger than Primakov, Putin was not a high-ranking official in the Soviet state apparatus and so he was not personally affected by the demise of the Soviet government. For this reason, he was much more capable of adjusting to the new circumstances and playing the game under much more modest conditions. In marked contrast to Primakov, Putin also had few personal ties to the Arab World and the West Asia. He also had to work in a new and rapidly changing political environment in both the domestic and international arenas. Russia grew poorer and more capitalist, with growing socioeconomic disparities and a media controlled by the new financial elite, part of which expressed a pro-Israeli sympathy. At the same time, Russia's military and political power was declining. According to a German scholar Gerard Mangott, Russia lacked the economic and financial means to confront the West and this deprived Russia of being an attractive coalition partner on the international stage.⁸

In January 2000, when Putin was only acting-President before the 26 March Presidential elections, he accepted Arafat's invitation to visit to Palestinian territories (CDPSP, 1999: 24). Putin expressed his readiness to travel as soon as the circumstances allowed him to make use of Arafat's invitation. He also assured Arafat that under his leadership, Russia would continue to work for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the West Asia, which could be achieved only through the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. His letter to Arafat was released on the eve of the Moscow meeting of the Group of Assistance to Multiparty Talks on the West Asian Peace Process that had been established following the Madrid Peace Conference, but whose activities had been effectively paralyzed from the time of Netanyahu won the 1996 election. The Group included the US and Russia, as co-presidents, as well as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, the EU, Norway, Canada, Japan, China, and Switzerland. It worked in five sections dealing with the issues such as regional

⁸ For details see, Mangott, Gerard (2000), "A Giant on Its Knees: Structural Constraints on Russia's Global Role," *International Politics*, 37 (4): 479-508.

economic development, refugees, arms control, regional security, and the environment. Syria and Lebanon boycotted the Moscow gathering, which started on 1 February 2000. Addressing the plenary meeting, Putin stated, "Russia is linked by historic, spiritual, commercial, and economic ties with the West Asian region. First of all, there exists geographic proximity. We are, consequently, sincerely interested in the establishment of international legal norms of interaction in settlement. We are not waging the struggle for spheres of influence" (Kreutz, 2007: 68)

By the end of June 2000, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vasily Sredin who was also the Russian President's special envoy to the West Asia, visited Israel and the Palestinian territories. Following month, Moscow officially expressed great optimism about prospects for a peace settlement. Following his talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Vasily Sredin told the press that there was a real possibility, "if you want a unique chance, to attain a final settlement of conflict between Palestine and Israel before the end of this Year." Disregarding the lack of an invitation, the Camp David talks Russia hailed the US initiative. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful summit, and the apparent failure of the American initiative, Moscow again found itself in the middle of the Arab-Israeli maelstrom. On 26 July 2000, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement that Moscow was convinced that now the peace process has entered a crucial stage, all political forces and public circles in Israel and Palestine should show pragmatism and great responsibility (Kreutz, 2004: 35).

After the *Intifada*, which began in September 2000, Russia has sought to play an active role in attempts to promote a settlement of the dispute. Moscow's position was in broad harmony with the US, arguing that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority should abide by the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and Tenet plan. In March 2002, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov confirmed that Russian policy to act in coordination with the US, European Union and the United Nations aimed at overcoming the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and resuming the progress towards an all-inclusive Arab-Israeli settlement based (Smith, 2002: 2).

Quartet in Arab-Israel Peace Process

The Quartet comprises of the US, the United Nation (UN), the European Union (EU), and the Russian Federation. The Quartet came into being in the spring of 2002, in the aftermath of Israel's counter-offensive on the West Bank. The two-state solution has been the settlement envisioned by the Quartet and it produced its first joint communiqué at a Madrid on 10 April 2002. The communiqué affirmed that there was no military solution to the conflict. It called for a two-state solution based on the relevant UN Security Council resolution 242 and 338. It warmly endorsed Saudi Crown prince Abdullah's peace initiative, in turn endorsed in Beirut by the Arab League (27-28 March, 2002) as a significant contribution towards a comprehensive peace, including Syria and Lebanon (Mandel, 2004). The Quartet subsequently reaffirmed, Arafat as the recognized, elected leader of the Palestinian people. It recalled for immediate Israeli withdrawal and progress in moving towards security. It also affirmed a process of Israeli and Palestinian steps in fighting terror and ending incitement and violence. It called for immediate Israeli release of frozen Palestinian funds and finally commended its own action plan, thereby sidestepping the requirement that Palestinian statehood emerge as the outcome of negotiations (Mandel, 2004)

The Quartet did pay tribute to the idea of reform in the Palestinian political institution by welcoming Arafat's announcement of a 100 days reform programme. The Quartet thus remained committed to Arafat's reform initiative. Similarly, the Quartet welcomed the supposed willingness of Arab states to contribute to peacemaking to help Palestinian build institutions of good government and democracy. Since the Arab states did not themselves possess such institutions, this call had no meaning. Lastly, the Quartet simply ignored Bush's call for a provisional Palestinian states, with all the geographical, political, and military limitations this implied (Mandel, 2003).

On September 17, 2002, the Quartet issued a third communiqué following a meeting of its principals, as well as representatives of five Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria), the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and Israel. In announcing the Quartet's policy or roadmap, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan spoke of

producing a “performance-driven and hope-driven” plan, a formula suggesting that the needs of Israelis and Palestinians were both being taken into account. The roadmap would have the ambitious goal of achieving a final and comprehensive settlement within three years (Mandel, 2003). Implementation of the roadmap would occur in three phases. The first phase (then scheduled to end in May 2003) would deal with Palestinian security reform, Israeli withdrawal, and support for Palestinian elections. There would also be an ad hoc liaison committee to “review the humanitarian situation and identify priority areas”. The second phase (beginning in mid-2003) would deal with creating a Palestinian state with provisional borders and a new constitution as “way stations” on the road to a final settlement. The third phase (2004-mid-2005) would consist of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at a final settlement. During this final phase, Palestinian political and economic reform would be paralleled by Israeli measures to improve Palestinian lives, permitting resumption of economic activity, lifting curfews and closures, releasing Palestinian revenues, and ending all settlement activity. The Palestinians would work with both the US and Arab States to reform their security services and combat terrorism (Mandel, 2004).

On 4 May 2004 the Quartet stated that “We call on both parties to take steps to fulfil their obligations under the roadmap, as called for in Security Council Resolution 1515 and in our previous statements, and to meet the commitments they made at the Red Sea summits in Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheikh”. It also reaffirmed the President Bush’s 24 June 2002 call for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 through a settlement negotiated between parties. It also noted that no party should take unilateral actions that seek to predetermine issues that can only be resolved through negotiation and agreement between the two parties. Any final settlements on issues such as borders and refugees must be mutually agreed to by Israelis and Palestinians based on Security Council Resolution 242 and 338, the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Process, previous agreements (Quartet Statement, 2004).

Russia's Independent Initiative in Arab-Israel Peace Process

In spite of, being one of the Quartet members, Russia tried to take independent initiative in the Arab-Israel conflict. Russia wanted to take advantage of its close relation with the PLO and wished to maintain this special relationship with the post-PLO Palestinian leadership (*Hamas*). This was an attempt by Russia to carve out a greater and more independent role for itself in the West Asia and increase its options and influences. In April 2005, when Putin visited Egypt, he attempted to raise Russia's profile by suggesting a special meeting in Moscow to discuss an Arab-Israel peace settlement (Smith, 2006: 1). The visit of the *Hamas* Palestinian National Authority (PNA) leadership to Russian in early March 2006 marked a further attempt by Russia to differentiate its West Asian policy from that of the other members of the Quartet. The US and the EU have refused to have any relationship with *Hamas* as they see it as a terrorist organization, and also because it refuses to accept the right of Israel to exist. President Putin's decision to invite the *Hamas* leadership to Russia therefore marks a significant break with the West (CDPSP, 2006: 17).

However, the decision to pursue a closer relationship with *Hamas* underlines many of the ambiguities and conflicting interests in Russia's West Asian policy. Russia on the "one hand desires to have a cordial cooperative relationship with both Israel and the USA, yet on the other hand also desires cooperation with *Hamas*, Iran and Syria, all of whom are having bad relation with Israel and USA" (Smith, 2006:1). The Russian leadership has been at pains to make clear that *Hamas* must accept the Quartet's three demands (namely, *Hamas* must: renounce violence; renounce its commitment to the destruction of Israel; and accept all previous peace agreements). At the same time Russia policy of dialogue enhanced its role in the Quartet. However the initial concern caused by Russia's decision to invite *Hamas* to Moscow appears to have died down after Russia made it clear that it would not be deviating from the Quartet's position in favour of the Road Map. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that "the Russians assure us, after President Putin's comments that anything that they say to *Hamas* will simply be to reinforce that message (that is, the message of the Quartet) (Rice, 2006).

Russia takes the view that *Hamas* in power was a reality that cannot be ignored. In February 2006, Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov stated that sooner or later the whole world community would have to establish contact with the *Hamas* movement. This was echoed by the presidential special representative on international cooperation to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime, Anatoliy Safonov. In February 2006 he observed that the isolation of the *Hamas* movement, on the part of Israel and number of western states would be unproductive. He argued that, "Representatives of the *Hamas* movement have won the trust of the people and become a political force. It is absolutely right to give the new Palestinian authorities the possibility to show how they are going to behave in this specific situation, rather than closing the doors on them. Talking, helping and encouraging a path that suits all are what is needed. *Hamas* has two wings- political and armed. The activities of the second wing included methods and practices we do not accept" (Smith, 2006: 2).

Sergey Lavrov, commenting on the discussions in Moscow with the *Hamas* leadership, stated that "we expressly conveyed to the Leadership of *Hamas* the coordinated position of the Quartet of international mediators on the necessity of fulfilling all the criteria that were formulated in the Quartet's statement at the end of January this year. It is, above all, the necessity of commitment to all the existing accords in the peace process; the necessity of recognizing the right of Israel to exist as a partner in negotiations, and the necessity of giving up armed methods of dealing with political issues" (Lavrov: 2006).

However, both the US and Israel appeared reassured by the line that Russia took in the talks. Vladimir Putin contacted acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert by telephone in early March 2006 to brief him on the Russian-*Hamas* talks. Whilst Olmert thought Russia was mistaken to enter into dialogue with *Hamas* before it accepts the three demands of the Quartet, he reassured that Putin would require *Hamas* to accept the three demands. Olmert stated that, "Russian President Vladimir Putin relayed a clear, sharp, unmistakable message to me, saying: I support these three principles; I am true to these three principles. And I would like to add something that may have not been reported until now, which I believe to be of considerable importance. The Russian president further said; I told my friend Ariel Sharon, whom I admire and whom I wish recovery from the

bottom of my heart, that Russia is forever obliged to never again harm the state of Israel . And now, the president said, I am passing my commitment to Ariel Shorn on to you as his successor, as the man who is carrying on his course.” (Smith, 2006:4)

Overall, it would appear that Russia's decision to invite the *Hamas* leadership to Russia has not damaged its relationship either with Israel or the rest of the Quartet. The current Russian leadership is unlikely to take any steps that would risk any major rupture of its relationship with Israel. It has probably also raised its standing in the rest of the Arab world, and judging by the French and Spanish reaction to the decision to invite the *Hamas* leadership, it has also gained some support from Europe. From Russia's standpoint therefore, the invitation to *Hamas* was beneficial.

Therefore, it can be argued that it was the convergence of interest of the Superpowers, which avoided direct confrontation in West Asia but at the same time both tried to solve the Arab-Israel conflict according to their own national interests. Driven by its interests in the Arab world, the USSR tried to solve the conflict to serve its interests but this did not materialize because of its relatively weak position in the international politics. One can argue that it was the Cold War which prolonged the Arab-Israel conflict. After the Cold War, the international system went in the favour of US and Israel which resulted in a marginal role for Russia in the Arab-Israel Peace Process. Almost from the 1990 to 1999 Russia followed the American lead in promoting Arab-Israel peace. After 2000, when Putin became President, Russia's role became the stronger in the Arab-Israel Peace process. In 2006, PNA election saw the defeat of the *Fatah*, and emergence of *Hamas* and this gave a special role to Russia in the Arab-Israel conflict. Russia thus has good relation with both *Hamas* and *Fatah* (Palestine) as well as Israel. But one cannot ignore the fact that still Russia has its constraints and US has a privileged role in Arab-Israel conflict. In a sense, the balance of power which shifted towards the US gave more leverage to Israel in Arab-Israel conflict after the Cold War.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Since the restoration of ties in 1991, Israel's relations with Russia have improved in various areas encompassing political, economic and strategic aspects. Historically, the USSR were accorded recognition to Israel in 1948, and facilitated (through, the Czech Republic) the arms supplies Israel in 1948. However, the Cold War, the nature of bipolarity of international system led to the deterioration relations and June 1967 war resulted in the rapture of diplomatic ties. At the same time both maintained good communications through various direct and indirect channels. Interestingly, Israel never wanted to break off relationship with the USSR because of the substantial Jewish population in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In the late 1980s Mikhail Gorbachev brought about drastic changes in the policy towards Israel. He not only normalized and re-established diplomatic relationship with Israel in 1991 but also allowed the resumption of massive Jewish immigration to Israel.

After the disintegration of the USSR both Israel and Russia re-examined their relationship and expanded their ties in various field like trade and commerce, energy, agriculture, medicine, science and technology etc. Both have established joint mechanism in the field of combating terrorism and joint commission on trade as well. Particularly, the massive immigration of Jews from the Former Soviet Union (FSR) boosted the ties of Israel and Russia. With more than a million immigrants from the FSR, almost all of them Russian-speaking, Israel has the largest Russian Diaspora in the world. Many of them have dual Israel/Russian citizenship and business interests in both countries. This socio-cultural bridge created the commercial bondage which doubled trade to \$1.5 billion in direct trade and over a billion in energy deals. The Russian immigrants played decisive role in government formation since the 1996 Knesset elections. Two parties *Yisrael Ba'Aliya* and *Yisrael Beteinu* have been dominant players in the domestic politics of Israel. Therefore it can be argued that the increased number of Russian immigrants had improved the Israel and Russia relations.

Conclusion

Both countries are also expanding military cooperation. From being the principal supplier of weapons to the Arab countries, Russia has entered into partnership with Israel in upgrading and development of early warning systems. Their cooperation extends to the space technology. Both entered into agreement for the protection of intellectual property rights designed in part to protect Russian rights when Israel sells Russian-made platforms with its military technology added to them. The most visible area of cooperation between Israel and Russia has been in counter-terrorism.

Russia's growing relations with countries such as Iran and Syria, which Israel sees as its primary adversary, are complicating the Israeli-Russian relations. With growing concerns over Iran's suspected nuclear ambition, Russia role has come under increasing scrutiny and criticisms from Israel and the US. By reiterating closer ties with Israel, however, President Vladimir Putin has sought to minimize the adverse effects of Russia's growing military and economic ties with Iran and Syria.

Russia's fortunes have also improved in the peace process. The end of the Cold War saw the marginalization of Russia in the Arab-Israel peace process and for nearly a decade after the Madrid conference of 1991, Russia merely followed the American lead. Since the election of Putin as President in 2000, Russia has become stronger in the Arab-Israel Peace process. The unexpected victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections further enhanced the Russian role and influence. Because it has good relation with Hamas, Fatah as well as Israel, Russia could play a greater role in peace process than anytime since the disintegration of the USSR. However, Russia's overall role in the region would continue to be constrained by the American factor and its influence in the region.

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