

**RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT WITH
ISRAEL, 1991-2014**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEVIDEEN



**CENTRE FOR RUSSIAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI- 110067**

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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies

School of International Studies

New Delhi-110067

Tel.: (O) +91-11-2670 4365

Fax: (+91) -11-2674 1586, 2586

Email: crcasjnu@gmail.com

Date: 21-07-2017

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT WITH ISRAEL, 1991-2014" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

David Jen
DEVIDEEN

CERTIFICATE

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

A. Upadhyay

Prof. Archana Upadhyay
CHAIRPERSON/CRCAS

Nalin Kumar Mohapatra

Dr. Nalin Kumar Mohapatra
SUPERVISOR

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abbreviations

Chapter I: Introduction and Research Design 1-20

Review of Literature

Definition, Rationale and scope of the study

Research Questions

Hypotheses

Research Methodology

Chapter II: Russia-Israel Relations: Political and Economic Dimensions 21-62

Russian Foreign Policy

Determinants of Russian Foreign policy

Russian Foreign Policy towards West Asia Region

Russia-Israel Relations: mutual interests

Russia-Israel relations in the Cold War Period

Stalin Era, 1948-1953

Khrushchev Era, 1953-1964

Brezhnev Era, 1964-82

Gorbachev Era, 1985-1991

Russia-Israel relations in the Post-Cold War Period

Boris Yeltsin Era, 1991-1999

Vladimir Putin Era, 2000-2008

Dmitry Medvedev Era, 2008-2012

Vladimir Putin's period (from 2012)

Economic Relationship between Russia and Israel

Trade and Economic Relationship

Cooperation in Hi-Tech and Innovation Technology

Cooperation in Energy Sector

Military Cooperation

Chapter III: Russia's Policy towards Arab-Israel Peace Process

63-107

Soviet policy towards Arab-Israel conflicts during the Cold War Period

Stalin's policy towards First Arab- Israeli war, 1948-49

Khrushchev's policy of "Peaceful Coexistence" and the 1956 Suez Crises

Brezhnev's policy towards the Six-Day War of 1967

The War of Attrition

The Arab- Israeli War, 1973 or Yom Kippur war:

The Soviet Union and the Oil Crisis of 1973:

Camp David Accord and Soviet Union's Absence

The Lebanon War, 1982

First Intifada, 1987-1993

Palestinian declaration of independence

Madrid Conference, 1991 and Soviet Union's role:

Russia's Policy towards Arab-Israel Peace Process

Oslo Peace Agreement, 1993

Gaza-Jericho Agreement, 1994

Oslo II Agreement 1995

Wye Memorandum, 1998

Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum 1999

Russia's policy towards Israeli-Palestinian peace process under Putin:

Camp David Summit, 2000

Sharm al-Sheikh summit, October 2000:

Taba negotiations, January 2001:

Russia's approach towards Arab-Israel conflicts after 9/11 terror attack:

'Quartet' on the West Asia

The Road Map

Russia's role in the 'Quartet on West Asia'

Russia's approach towards Iraq war and Arab-Israel conflict

Russia's policy towards Second Lebanon War

Annapolis conference, 2007

Palestine: as an UN observer State

Gaza Conflict of 2014

Chapter IV: Russian Diaspora in Israel **108-146**

Jewish Immigration to the Palestine

Russian Jewish Emigration during the Cold War Period

Russian Jewish Emigration in the Post-Cold War period

Social and cultural integration of Russian Jews in Israel

Cultural Segregation

Russian Diaspora as a factor in interaction between Russia and Israel

Role of Russian immigrants in Israeli Politics

Russian immigrants' impact on Arab-Israeli conflicts

Chapter V: Russia-Israel relations and External Factors **147-186**

Israel's concern over Russia's support to Iranian Nuclear Program

Iranian Nuclear Programme

Russia and the Iranian Nuclear Programme

Israeli concern over Iranian Nuclear Program

Russia's approach to the Israeli-US relationships

US interests in the West Asia

US-Israel Relations: Political Dimensions

Economic Cooperation between the US and Israel

Russia's concern over US-Israel relationship

Russia's approach towards Arab Spring: a Case of Syria

The Syrian Crisis

Russia's intervention in Syrian Crisis

Israel's View on Arab Spring: the case of Syrian Crisis

Chapter VI: Conclusion **187-193**

References **194-226**

Abbreviations

CPSU	–	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EC	–	European Community
EU	–	European Union
FSR	–	Former Soviet Republics
FSU	–	Former Soviet Union
IAEA	–	International Atomic Energy Agency
IS	–	Islamic State
NATO	–	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	–	Non-Proliferation Treaty
PA	–	Palestinian Authority
PLO	–	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	–	United Nations
US	–	United States
USSR	–	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter I

Introduction and Research Design

Introduction

The West Asia region is located at the junction of the world's three continents namely Asia, Europe and Africa. Its strategic location gives importance to its water and land transit ways. The sea and land transit ways, as well as the huge reserves of fossil fuels gives it geostrategic and geo-economics importance. The geo-economics and geostrategic location of West Asia region attracts major powers of the world. During the cold war period, both superpowers- the US and the Soviet Union were heavily involved in this region. Both countries were, even now, trying to win the heart of the peoples. (Cohen 2003: 327)

The Soviet Union was heavily involved in the West Asia region, particularly in the Arab-Israel conflict. Soviet Union supported the UN partition plan of Palestine land into an Arab state and a Jewish state and became the first country in the world that gave de jure recognition to Israel. (Brown 1948: 620) In addition, the Soviet Union permitted the emigration of some 200,000 Jews from eastern European countries and it also promoted Zionist groups to organize the preparations for prospective emigrants. (Golan 1990: 37) It also supported Israel during the first Arab-Israeli war that happened in 1948-49, when the latter was attacked by the then Western-oriented Arab countries (mainly Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan) which opposed the 1947 United Nations partition plan of Palestine land into a Jewish and an Arab state. By the end of 1948, the Israeli army properly equipped with arms provided by Soviet Union, via communist Czechoslovakia, defeated combined Arab forces. (Pressman 2005: 6) But this warm relationship between USSR and Israel could not last longer. By the end of 1948, problems began to arise in the emigration of Jews from Soviet bloc. The arms deliveries to Israel fall down and contacts between Israeli diplomats and Soviet Jews were strictly restricted. (Golan 1990: 38) The deteriorating relationship between both countries

reached the turning point when Stalin moved against Jews for what he called the Doctors' Plot, an alleged attempt to poison Soviet leaders. The severity of relationship came to a head in February 1953 when a bomb was detonated on the grounds of the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv, wounded three embassy staff. In turn, Joseph Stalin severed diplomatic relationship with Israel. However, within four months of Stalin's death in March 1953, the diplomatic relations with Israel were resumed. (Primakov 2009: 255)

However, Soviet Union's relation with Israel was not same as before. The Soviet Union supported Arab countries in the next Arab-Israeli wars against Israel. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 became breaking point in relationship between Soviet Union and Israel. The Soviet Union second time severed its diplomatic relation with Israel when Israel ignored Soviet Union's demand for an immediate ceasefire. (ibid: 259)

Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power marked a significant improvement in relationship between Soviet Union and Israel. Both countries sanctioned many informal and official meetings and Gorbachev, in addition, allowed Soviet Jews emigration to increase during the 1987 and 1988. (Ekedahl et. al. 1988: 575) In the long run, Gorbachev restored full diplomatic relationship with Israel in October 1991 just two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev not only allowed Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel, he also joined US in co-sponsoring a UN resolution that reversed the "Zionism is Racism" resolution. (Freedman 1995: 234)

The disintegration of the USSR has had a substantial impact upon the geographical features of the Russia and its relations with the rest of the world as well. The international boundaries of Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, in substantially differ from the former Soviet Union and that phenomenon kept Russian Federation considerably away from the West Asia region. However, Russia remains a largest state in the world, "extending for five thousand miles from east to west across eleven time zones and for fifteen hundred miles from its arctic north to the black sea, the Caucasus, and the mountains of southern Siberia". (Cohen 2003: 200) Russia's unique geostrategic dimension enables it to be an important player in both continents-Europe and Asia. In Eastern Europe, Indian subcontinent, West Asia region and the Pacific Rim region, Russia functions as a "multiregional Eurasian power" and help to

prevent any one country to control over the region. Russia's exclusive geographical dimensions reckon it as global rather than regional player and allow it to have multilateral ties with all the major powers of the world and perform as a counterbalancing role in the post-cold war era. (Morozova 2009: 670)

Russia is an effective player in the West Asia region and its relations with the State of Israel has been a long-standing and sometimes depressing one, moving ups and downs. More than two decades of absence of diplomatic relationship between Moscow and Israel, both countries reestablished diplomatic relations in October 1991 just two months before the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the post- cold war era, Moscow sees Israel as its closest collaborator in West Asia region. The trade and cultural relations between Russia and Israel began to develop. Israel is the Russia's second largest trading partner in the West Asia after Turkey and holds largest Russian Diaspora outside the former Soviet Union. In addition, Russia's close relationship with Israel enables it to play major role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. (Freedman 1998: 147-149) Russia and Israel also cooperate in energy sector. Although Israel is located next to the oil-rich countries but unresolved Arab-Israel conflict prevents it to cooperate with its neighbors in energy sector. The unfriendly relations with its neighbors forced Israel to import its energy needs from foreign countries like Russia, Mexico and Africa. (Bahgat 2010: 406).

Another factor that stimulates Russia to develop good relations with Israel is its connectivity to the Mediterranean Sea. Israel is the littoral country of Mediterranean Sea which "has been probably the most important highway in the history, the root where Orient and Occident and Europe and Africa met in commerce of goods and culture and in military rivalry. It is still a connecting point between East and the West." (Roucek 1953: 347) The Mediterranean Sea and the West Asia region were, still now, always in the imperial interests of superpowers. (ibid: 348) Since 1769, Russia has remained an active player in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea except for short duration due to external causes. In the post cold war period, Russia's main goal is to revive its influence in this region that is rapidly gaining importance because of its energy reserves and key strategic position. The deal between Israel and Russian company Gazprom in July 2012 on gas extraction paved the way for Russia in this direction. Russia's energy policy is to block any

alternative to its control over Europe's gas supplies. Russia is not only attempting to monopolize the infrastructure that delivers gas from Caspian and Central Asia to Europe, but also obtaining a key role in the exploitation of energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. (Nopens 2013)

In terms of security implications in West Asia region, Russia's relation with Israel is complex. They shared same view on some issues and different view on another one. Russia and Israel, both has established friendly relation with Turkey and they have more or less same view on Turkey. But on the issue of Iranian nuclear programme, both countries shared opposite view to each other. On the one side, Russia is aiding Iran in its nuclear programme, and on the another side, Israel with international community is putting pressure on Iran to disrupt the nuclear programme (NCAFP Roundtable 2008).

Russian President Vladimir Putin adopted more assertive policy to counter US influence in the West Asia region. Moscow provides aid to the Arab countries especially Syria and Iran to undermine western influence. Both countries viewed as anti-US in the region. It also conferred legitimacy to Hamas and Hezbollah, which US considered as terrorist organizations. At the same time, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov charged Israel with providing military equipment and training programs to Georgia and he also questioned Russia's relations with Israel. (Bugajski 2009: 48-49) However, Russian policy-makers did not always made Washington-centric policy or its relationship with the Western countries was not simply a byproduct of its interactions with other countries. Yet, the policies of Western countries towards the other regions did have a major impact on Russia's relationship with the Western countries. (Spechler 2010: 35). In the West Asia, Russia has considerably worked to develop good relations with all major countries of the region. Moscow maintained its relations with Tehran, and expanded its ties with Turkey and Israel. Although Russia failed to pursue Iran to send its used nuclear fuel to Russia, Moscow continues its engagement with Iran on the question of nuclear issues. Russian President Putin welcomed negotiations between Western countries and Iran over Iranian nuclear programme, but warned western countries against military strike against Iran or imposing additional sanctions on Iran. Vladimir Putin warned that such action would be really catastrophic. (Tsygankov 2013: 246) Despite Russia has

historically strong ties with Arab countries, the Moscow also worked to improve relations with Israel. Both countries- Russia and Israel signed a \$100 million deal in military field. Russia expressed its desire to purchase unmanned aerial vehicles from Israel that enables Russian security forces to tighten surveillance over Georgia. In addition, Russia also turned to improve its relations with Turkey, the two countries worked to cooperate in energy sector and improving security in the Black Sea region. In May 2010, for example, the two countries inked an agreement to carry Russian oil from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. The two countries is also cooperating in gas projects such as pipeline from Russia to Greece, Israel and Italy and from Russia to southern Europe- both through Turkey or the Turkish sector of the Black Sea waters. (ibid)

The Arab spring which started in the last month of 2010 in Tunisia slightly spread across the Arab world. Russia sees Arab spring as a setback to the revival of its influence in the Arab world. Earlier Moscow interpreted the Arab spring as a planned conspiracy of western countries to decrease Russia's influence in the region. Eventually, Russia moved away from its earlier notion and described the revolutions as a return to the civilizational Islamic roots by Arabian countries. Russia's economic and political relations negatively affected with the countries that have gone through Arab spring. (Malashenko 2013: 8-9) Russia directly intervened in two countries of the Arab world namely Libya and Syria and tried to keep old rulers into the power. Earlier Russia vetoed many UNSC resolutions that permitted European intervention in Libya. But after the intense pressure from international community, Russia kept away itself from Libya's Muammar Gadhafi by not vetoing the UNSC resolution that permitted the use of force against him. At the same time, Russian officials are also concerned about the possible radicalization of the West Asia countries. Russia, jointly with China vetoed the US and European- sponsored UNSC resolutions on Syria. Fearing that such resolutions would lead to military intervention and regime change in Syria, as happened in Libya. (Tsygankov 2013: 247) Israel also perceived the Arab spring as a threat to its national security. Israel sees this mass movement as the revival of the Islamization and refrain itself from supporting the anti-government protesters in different countries. (Goren et. al. 2013:1)

Review of Literature

Adequate literature has been available for the understanding of the Russia's strategic engagement with Israel in the post-cold war era. Russia's increasing relation with Israel is being a key issue in the academic debate among the political scientists, historians and politicians. The academicians are looking at the broader perspectives of strengthening of bilateral relations between Russia and Israel in the post cold war era.

Soviet Union-Israel Relations during the Cold War Period

Soviet Union supported the UN partition plan for Palestine into two states- a Jewish and an Arab state. On the basis of UN partition plan of 1947, the Jewish state namely the State of Israel proclaimed its independence on May 14, 1948. Soviet Union became the first country in the world that gave de jure recognition to the newly emerged Jewish state. (Freedman 2000) Soviet Union also provided military assistance to the State of Israel against then western-oriented Arab countries in the first Arab-Israeli war. However, in the subsequent years Soviet Union turned to the Arab countries. In the year 1955, when Baghdad pact was formed, provided an opportunity to Soviet Union to closely engage with Egypt, who opposed the creation of Baghdad pact (CENTO). The arms deal between Czechoslovakia and Egypt kept Israel to distance itself from the Soviet Union. However, the concern for the Soviet Jews persuaded Israel to adopt a soft approach in conducting its relations with the Soviet Union. The Six-day war of 1967 between Israel and Arab countries became the turning point in Soviet Union-Israel relations and both countries broke up diplomatic relations. (Bhutani 1975) The Soviet Union's ambition to seek a ground in the West Asia propelled it to support the creation of the Jewish state and assist the Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel. The Soviet Union's own interests were behind its involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Soviet Jewry played a major role in deciding the nature of Soviet Union-Israel relations. The soviet diplomatic mission to Israel and Israeli diplomatic mission to Soviet Union helped to enhance bilateral relations between two countries (Ro'I 1980). Although Soviet Union broke up diplomatic relations with Israel in the wake of 1967 crises but soviet leaders never questioned the statehood of the State of Israel. The Soviet Union assisted Arab countries against Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and retain anti-Israeli attitude in the

next Arab-Israeli war of 1973 but she never questioned the sovereignty and existence of the State of Israel from any world stage. (Ro'i 1979) The Soviet Union-Israeli relations were not completely dissolved since the breakup of the diplomatic relations between two countries in 1967. The Soviet Union and Israel have had secret diplomatic contacts since 1967 when both countries severed diplomatic relations. Many authors have shed light on this secret diplomacy and referred to a wealth of documents collected from Israeli archives and interviews of Israeli officials and academicians. The Soviet Union-Israeli contacts were continued despite several differences between them like strong Soviet support to the PLO and Arab countries against Israel, Israel's close ties with the United States and controversy over the emigration of soviet Jews to the Israel. (Klinghoffer and Apter 1985) During the major period of the cold war, the Soviet Union supported Arab countries against Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict. But there were some phenomenon that setbacks Soviet Union's policy in the West Asia region. The removal of the soviet military advisers from Egypt and unilateral cancellation of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty of friendship and cooperation by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat frustrates Soviet Union and compel it to rethink its policies in the West Asia. After accession to power in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev moves to improve Moscow's political position in the West Asia region. He started to improve relations with Israel and sanctioned several diplomatic and informal dialogues with Israeli officials. In this sequence, Gorbachev announced the increase in the emigration of Soviet Jewish people to Israel in the 1987 and 1988. He also urged Arab leaders like Syrian President Assad to seek peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. But at the same time it would not eager to abandon its investment of over thirty years in the Arab world (Goodman and Ekedahl 1988). After coming to power, Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the CPSU, gave more importance to relationship with the State of Israel. He termed the absence of Soviet Union-Israeli diplomatic relations as abnormal and insists to repair the Soviet Union-Israel relations that rupture in 1967. The reopening of Soviet-Israeli relation marked a new direction in Soviet policy towards the West Asia region. Gorbachev gradually worked to improve relations with all major countries of this region, ranging from Egypt and Israel to the Persian Gulf. But the Soviet policy of military parity with the US in this region remains unchanged (Golan 1987).

Russia-Israel Relations: Political and Economic Dimensions

The new phase of bilateral relationship between Moscow and Israel began in October 1991 when the USSR resumed diplomatic relations with Israel just two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical scenario has been changed and newly emergent state Russia is functioning in a different manner. In the post-cold war period, Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union, tries to revive its political influence in the West Asia region. There are three main reasons that prompt Russia to engage in the West Asia region- the geographical proximity, economic factor and cultural factor. The geographical proximity of this region to the Russia's southern border is probably the most important reason behind Russia's engagement with this region. Russia's increasing economic relations with major countries of this region like Turkey and Israel is contributing to the enhancement of the Russian economy and the 900,000 Israeli citizens who emigrated from former Soviet Union have developed strong cultural ties between Russia and Israel (Kreutz 2002). In the post-cold war period, Russia's relations with Israel grown rapidly and the trade between two countries touched a new high. The Russia-Israel relations were on the peak until 1996, the year when pro-western Andrei Kozyrev replaced by hardliner Yevgeny Primakov as Russian foreign minister. The trouble in the Russian domestic politics has had a significant impact on Russian foreign policy like other democratic countries. The replacement of pro-western Andrei Kozyrev by Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister in 1996 signaled a slightly chill relationship between Russia and Israel. Russia's relations with Israel basically drive by three reasons- economic, diplomatic and cultural. And Israel's interest to improve relations with Russia due to four reasons- steady flow of Jews immigration, to prevent the export of Russian nuclear weapons to Israel's neighboring countries, trade relations with Russia and Israeli hope of Russia's impartial diplomatic position in the West Asia (Freedman 1998). In the year of 1991 and 1992, Russian-Israeli relations were growing positively in terms of economic, political and cultural cooperation. Since at that time, the pro-westerners were dominant in the Russian domestic political arena. But in the later years, pro-westerners began losing their influence to the nationalists in the domestic political arena. The appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Russian foreign minister in early 1996 signaled the beginning of strained

relationship between Russia-Israeli relationships. The same year, election happened in Israel also, and hard-liner Netanyahu came into power who opposed many concessions made to Palestinians in the peace process. Moscow's criticisms of Israeli actions in Palestine and other Arab countries such as Lebanon became more frequent. Thus, Russian-Israeli relations reached to an impasse, despite the growing trade ties between two countries, the political relations were negatively affected (Nizameddin 1999). Under Putin presidency the concept of Eurasianism has diminished in Russian foreign policy and the notion of Geopolitics i.e. the politics of spheres of influence and hegemonic spatial control took shape. With the rise of geopolitical thought in Russian foreign policy, Moscow turns to close the door of ideology-based foreign policy and started pursuing national interest based foreign policy (Morozova 2009). After assuming presidency, Vladimir Putin tried to improve relations with all major countries of the West Asia. Putin's concern over terrorism in Russian territory and in the world as well brought Israel close to Russia on terrorism issue. Israel's support to Vladimir Putin's actions in the Chechnya boosted Russia-Israel cooperation to fight with terrorism collectively. Apart from this issue, the economic factor is another main reason behind increasing relationship between Russia and Israel. Although Russia is increasing its engagement with Israel but she is still ignoring Israel's concern over Russian support to Iranian nuclear programme. Russian officials argued that the sale of the nuclear reactors to Iran is necessary for the survival of the Russian atomic energy industry. Russia has also close relations with Israel's enemy country- Syria. (Katz (2005)

Russia's policy towards Arab-Israel conflict/Peace Process

The Arab-Israeli conflict was the central point in rivalry between two super powers- the US and Soviet Union during the cold war period. The Arab-Israeli conflict has its root in the past. The mass immigration of Jews to British-controlled Palestine and subsequently establishment of state of Israel annoyed the Arab peoples of this region that resulted in the consecutive Arab-Israel conflict. Actually the Arab-Israel conflict is a cultural and ideological conflict that has had affects the lives of the people of this area. (Goldscheider 2002) The West Asia region is focal area in world politics due to several factors: its geostrategic location, its oil and natural resources, its internal divisions and

conflicts and its ideological movements that have had destabilized its politics and society. Soviet Union's interest in the West Asia region is basically lies into strategic-political factors i.e. national interest and search for recognition as superpower. The ideological and economic interests seem to be less importance to this primary interest. Soviet Union supported western-sponsored UN partition plan of Palestine land into two states- a Jewish state and an Arab state. Soviet Union became first country in the world that recognized the State of Israel and later signed an arms deal (via Czechoslovakia) with Israel which decided the outcome of Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The scenario began to change in 1949 when Soviet Union joined Arab nations in the UN and reaffirmed a resolution that called for the internationalization of the Jerusalem. Soviet-Israeli relations came to an impasse in February 1953 when Soviet Union broke diplomatic relation with Israel which was resumed in July the same year. The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal of 1955 and Soviet-Syrian arms deal of 1956 indicated the shifting of Soviet policy towards Arab countries. The Suez crises of 1956 provided an opportunity to Soviet Union to involve directly in West Asia crises. The defeat of Soviet Union supported Arab countries in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war compelled Soviet Union to adopt a consistent and coherent policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soviet Union once again severed diplomatic relations with the State of Israel after Israel ignored the Soviet demand for immediate halt military actions against Syria. In the wake of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Soviet Union agreed to provide latest arms and equipments to Egypt to ensure that the Arabs were equal to the Israel in the war. After the defeat in the war, Egypt decided to negotiate a territorial settlement with Israel under the US sponsorship. Egyptian decision made a major setback for soviet policy in the West Asia region (Mahmood 1989). The West Asia region has never been in the primary soviet interests. Soviet Union's policy towards West Asia region guided by two reasons: protecting the border of the Soviet Union and competition with the West. Soviet policies in this region were primarily guided by superpower competition with the US since Soviet Union wanted to expand its influence in this region. Soviet Union earlier supported Israel because Arab countries was aiding by the Western countries in the first Arab-Israeli war. But later Soviet Union turned to the Arab countries since the US started to help Israel against Arab countries. The communist movements in West Asia slightly got low priority in Soviet foreign policy than the ideological conflict with the US-led

western bloc in the region (Golan 1990). By 1991, the world politics was undergoing with major changes such as the cold war between two superpowers ended and disintegration of Soviet Union took shape. In the midst of global changes, peace conference between Israel and its neighbors held in Madrid in October 1991 under the co-sponsorship of the Soviet Union and the US. The bilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries (Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan) and Palestinians who included in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation were arranged. Apart from bilateral talks, simultaneously multilateral negotiations began in January 1992 on several issues such as arms control, regional security, water, environment, refugees and regional development (Rodriguez 2011). The Oslo peace accords made a major breakthrough in the history of Arab-Israel conflict. It had been signed in Washington on September 13, 1993 after a several secret meetings between PLO and the Israeli officials in Oslo, Norway. By signing the agreement, PLO recognized Israel's right to existence with peace and security and accept the UNSC resolutions 242 and 338. On the other hand, Israel recognized PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and negotiating partner on behalf of Palestinians. A series of Oslo Peace Accord held between Israeli and Palestinian delegates but unable to reach the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian disputes. The Oslo peace process collapsed without reaching any final settlement. The failure of the Oslo peace accords once again proved the importance of an effective broker who exerts sufficient pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. The US as main broker of Oslo peace process failed to do this. The Oslo peace agreement was witnessed by the US, Russia and others. Although Russia's role was secondary to the US, but her presence shows that Russia had not lost her credentials in the West Asia and it was still a prominent player in the region (Avi Shlaim). The failure of the Oslo peace process and subsequently breakdown of Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 again deteriorated the situation in the West Asia region. In order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian disputes, the four major players namely Russian Federation, the US, the UN and EU came together to address the situation in the region. They formed a group in 2002 commonly known as 'Quartet on the West Asia'. The Russian Federation under Putin presidency started to play a significant role in the West Asia peace process. It took equal seat with the US, UN and the EU to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 'Quartet' members published a

'Roadmap' in April 2003 and sought to correct the shortcomings in the Oslo peace process. However, after one decade, the group failed to address the problem and situation remains the same in the region. (Elgindy 2012) However, in the fall of 2003, the Israeli PM Sharon unilaterally announced the idea of withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and granting Palestinians more contiguous land in the West Bank, joining Areas A and B as defined under Oslo II agreement. The world leaders endorsed the idea of unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and called it as a step towards the implementation of 'Roadmap' for peace. (Smith 2013) A significant progress has been achieved in the direction of two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian disputes when the Palestine state become the UN 'non-member observer state' in 2011. The Russian Federation praised this move and hoped for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian disputes. (Blarel 2011)

Russian Jewish Diaspora in Israel

The status of the Jews in the Soviet Union/Russia and their immigration to the State of Israel has been a major deciding factor in the Russia-Israel relationships. The Jews were oppressed in the Soviet Union and they were being suppressed by the soviet leadership. Earlier, since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Jews condition was good and they stand nearly every step of the hierarchy of power. The Jews were close aide of Lenin and Trotsky and their representation in the first executive committee was more than the non-Jewish people. But after the civil war, Joseph Stalin began to eliminate the Trotsky and his collaborators. Joseph Stalin's party started to purge the Jews in the Soviet Union and the anti-Jews tendencies were echoed commonly in the soviet press at the time. The Jewish schools, training systems and scientific institutions were suppressed and Jewish writers and artists who degenerate Stalin cult were executed. The continuous repression of the soviet Jews forced them to flee from the Soviet Union and they started to immigrate to the US and Israel. (Walendy 2008) Since the establishment of the state of Israel, Soviet Union became the first country in the world that gave de jure recognition to the newly emerged State of Israel. The other Soviet republics also extended their support to the newly established State of Israel. After the establishment of the Soviet-Israel relations, Soviet Jews emigration became the focal issue between Soviet Union and Israel

relations. Since Israeli representatives pointed out to the need of Soviet Jews immigration, Soviet officials put precondition before Israel that the Soviet Jews emigration would be allowed when the country would adopt democracy and eradicate jingoistic regime. The Israeli officials also inked agreement with other Soviet republics for the emigration of Jews from their countries. (Pinkus 2005) In the 1970s, the Soviet leadership allowed the massive wave of Soviet Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union due to intense pressure from the West, especially from the US. (Freedman 2000) The Soviet leadership wanted to please the US, not Israel, and it also wanted to get the trade benefits from the US. (Bloomberg 2004) The second large wave of Soviet/Russian emigration started in 1989, few years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union and continued in the 1990s. In this wave, nearly one million Russia-speaking people immigrated to the State of Israel. (Bourhis et. al. 2004) The Russian Jews who immigrated to Israel were highly educated and professionally qualified and where they made an influential impact on various spheres of Israeli life such as educational, cultural and health care systems including military industries as well. The immigration of Russian Jews also contributed the enhancement of the Israeli security as it constitutes the adequate proportion of soldiers. (Ze'ev Khanin 2010) The Israeli culture and literature are heavily influenced by Russian language and culture. Some author pointed out that the founder of Israeli state mainly emigrated from former Russian empire and Soviet Union and their culture and literature are heavily influenced by their country of origin. (Moskovich 1996) These Russian-speaking immigrants have a great influence in Israeli politics. Since the formation of the state in 1948, all of the Prime Ministers of Israel, including the current one, Benjamin Netanyahu have had Russian ethnic roots. These “new Israelis” who emigrated from former Soviet Union account for nearly one-fourth of Israel’s non-Arab population. These groups constitute a cultural bridge between two countries. Russian tourists constitute the second largest section of visitors to Israel and Russian citizens consider Israel the second most attractive tourist destination. It is not necessary to have Visa for travel between two countries, which has led over 560,000 Russian tourists a year to visit Israel. Over 60 daily flights link several Russian cities with Israel. Nearly two-thirds of Russians view Israel favorably and this appears to be a steady trend as 90% of the respondents in a survey claim to have their opinion of Israel.

Vladimir Putin once expressed the sentiment of many of his compatriots when he said: “There is a little piece of Russia in Israel”. (Rabkin 2012) The timing of the migration is more important, be it departure or choice of the destination country. The integration process of the new settlers in the destination country is also varying from time to time. The integration process of Soviet Jews into the Israeli society was much easier for those who immigrated in the 1970s than those immigrated two decades later in 1990s. While the emigrations from the former Soviet Republics to Israel become much easier in the 1990s with the reopening of Israeli embassy in the Moscow than during the communist period. The 75-80% Soviet Jews opted to immigrate to Israel in the 1990s, because at the same time, the US government cancelled the special refugee program for the Soviet Jews. At the present time, Russian Jewish Diaspora, the ethno-national identities, multilingualism and the role of TV and internet is promoting a rich Russian ethnic sub-culture in their residing countries. However, Russian Israelis face discrimination in all aspects of political and economic sphere and targeted by politicians for vote in the election. Their family incomes are also 25-30 percent below the average income of other Israelis. (Remennick 2007)

Russia-Israel relationship and External Factors

While discussing Russia-Israel relations in term of Israel’s security concern, Russia’s policy towards Iranian Republic need to be evaluated. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian leadership started to give priority to former soviet republics. Because of geographical proximity of Iran to former soviet republics, Russia has had a special focus on this Islamic country. The economic factor is the main cause behind Russia-Iran relations. Iran is the major purchaser of Russian nuclear reactors (Freedman 2001). Russia’s policy towards Iranian nuclear programme is inevitable to examine while discussing Russia-Israel relations because Iran’s nuclear programme is directly related to Israel’s security issues. In the post-cold war era, Russia becomes the largest supplier of arms to Iran, eclipsed china by four fold. Russia’s relations with both conservative countries of West Asia namely Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Iran annoyed the State of Israel. In large, Russia’s policy towards West Asia region can be examined in three areas: the Arab- Israeli conflict, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Richard

Herrmann has pointed out that Moscow would not defend Arabs, except in the extreme case of total defeat, but would supply arms and weapons to Arab states and PLO sufficiently that they could resist surrender to Israel. (Herrmann 1994) Israel and Iran have had a long history of contradictions and Israel is very suspicious about Iranian nuclear programme. In fact, Iran is signatory of NPT and it has right to reproduce nuclear reactors for civilian purposes and yet, there is no evidence of producing nuclear weapon by Iranian nuclear reactors. But Iran's work on long- range ballistic missiles and the statement of Director-General of IAEA who could not rule out Iran's work on nuclear weapons troubled Israel. However, Israel is not and never has been a direct player of international efforts to seek a solution of controversial Iranian nuclear programme. The unsuccessful efforts of international players only frustrate Israel. (Landau 2013) Russian President Putin continues its predecessor Boris Yeltsin's policy towards Iran. Under Boris Yeltsin, Russia signed major arms agreement with Iran and also agreed to complete Bushehr nuclear reactors. Vladimir Putin strengthened Russia-Iran relationship by prohibiting Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement under which Russia has to cease arms supply to Iran by 2000. Moscow also protect Iran against sanctions imposed by the US and European Union. Russia's warm relationship with Iran troubled Israel and Israel has many times raised her concern before Russia which is aiding Iran for her nuclear programme (Freedman 2006).

The close relationship between the US and Israel is main concern for Russia while discussing Russian policy towards State of Israel. Israel has historically good relations with the United States. However, the US-Israeli relations began to chill in the first decade of the 21st century, especially after the regime change in the US in 2008 and subsequently in Israel in 2009. The Obama administration and Netanyahu government continue to share common interest in the West Asia, but they differ on the priority and the method of solution to the problem. In principle, both countries want two state solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but in practice both countries have different priorities and different strategies. The US wants Israel to first halt settlement construction in the occupied territories, but Netanyahu government refused to stop it. On the issue of Iranian nuclear programme, Israel seeks US support to unilaterally attack against Iranian nuclear installations, but the US refused to give green signal. (Waxman 2012)

Since the beginning of the political upheaval in the Arab world commonly known as Arab Spring, the US and Israel cheered opposite sides. The United States favored Arab masses and supported regime change while Israel appears for the survival of the ruling Arab autocrats. Israel sees any change in the Arab world would destabilize the region. The Netanyahu government sees that US-Israeli differences could be exploited by the other countries particularly by Russia. (Waxman 2012) Regarding the Syrian Crisis, the Russia's position has remained unchanged since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011. Russia urged the conflicting parties to abandon the use of force and find a peaceful solution of the conflict. While the international community building up pressure on Syrian regime to stop human rights violations by using sanctions, embargoes, recalling ambassadors and closing embassies, the Russian Federation, along with Chinese support, resisted most attempts to hike up international pressure on Assad regime of Syria. (Bagdonas 2012) While the US-led western countries calling for the oust of the Syrian President Assad from power, the Russian President Putin giving shelter to Assad regime of Syria. (Sharp and Blanchard 2013)

Definition, Rationale and scope of the study

The study focuses on geographical significance of Israel and Russia's engagement with it (Israel). Russia has had strong historical ties with the State of Israel. Since the emergence of the State of Israel as a sovereign state, Russia (then Soviet Union) became the first country who granted de jure recognition to the newly emerged Jewish state. Moscow also supported Israel in its War of Independence against Arab countries. But this warm relationship could not last longer and Moscow turned to the Arab countries and supported them against Israel in the next Arab-Israeli wars. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Moscow severed its diplomatic relationship with Israel. The general secretary of CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power signaled the starting of new relationship between Moscow and Israel. Both countries held several formal and informal meetings and reestablished diplomatic relationship in October 1991, just two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, adopted market economy and democracy in the political

sphere. During the Yeltsin presidency, the relationship between Russia and Israel was on the peak, the economic relations between both countries begun to develop and Israel become the Russia's second largest trading partner in the West Asia region after Turkey. Both countries also cooperating in other fields like energy sector, military sector and cultural sphere of the life. Israel holds the largest Russian Diaspora outside the former Soviet Republics. The Russian people have become the largest Jewish ethnic group in Israel. Both countries holds cultural program in each other country time to time. Russian media is highly popular in Israel and Russian language literature is also flourishing in the State of Israel, signaling the development of strong cultural ties between the two countries.

The present study highlights the developments in the bilateral relationship between Russia and Israel in the post-cold war period. And it also examined the role of Russian Federation in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the context of developments in post-1991 phase. It also discusses the economic and military cooperation between two countries and its importance to overcome from the strained relationship of the cold war period. Russia's resurgence in the West Asia region and its active participation in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process have changed the geopolitical scenario of the region. The research work also focus on the significance of Russian Jewish Diaspora in Israel and its role in the development of strategic relationship between these two countries-Russia and Israel over the years. Russian president Vladimir Putin's assertive policy towards West Asia region and Russia's engagement with Israel has changed the geopolitical landscape of this region. In the post cold war period, Russia has also maintained its relationship with Arab countries, where Soviet Union, the predecessor of the Russian Federation, had invested a lot during the cold war period. Russia's relationship with Arab countries sometimes annoyed the State of Israel.

Russia's close relations with other major countries of this region such as Iran and Turkey and how this affects the Russia-Israel relations have been examined in the present study. On the other hand, Israel's close friendships with the United States and its impact on Russia-Israel relationship have also been analyzed shortly. Russia's policy towards Arab uprising, especially Syrian crisis, has also been discussed in the present study.

Research Questions

- 1- Explain the geographical significance of Israel and its importance in the Russian foreign policy?
- 2- Discuss the role of Russian Federation in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the post cold war period?
- 3- Russia's continuous support to the Palestinian cause is a major blow to the Russia-Israel strategic relationship. Explain?
- 4- How Russian Diaspora in Israel is helping to boost the relationship between Russia and Israel?
- 5- Describe the nature of security implications in West Asia in the context of Russia-Israel relationship?
- 6- How Iranian Nuclear Programme is affecting the nature of Russia-Israel bilateral relationship?
- 7- The friendly relationship between US and Israel is a setback to Russia's engagement with Israel. Explain?

Hypotheses

- 1- The increasing interaction between Russia and Israel help Russia to play a major role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- 2- Russian Diaspora is providing necessary substance to the bilateral relations between Russia and Israel.
- 3- The recent geostrategic realignment in the West Asia region is providing opportunity to Russia to have a greater say in this region.

Research Methodology

This study aims at researching the objectives and reasons for Russia's strategic engagement with Israel in the post-cold war era. By using descriptive and analytical

methods, the study would focus on the following: first, there are many objectives and reasons (political, economic, and cultural and security) that motivates Russia to establish strong relationship with Israel. Second, there are many internal and external obstacles and problems that are restricting Russia to establish all round relationship with Israel. Third, Russian Diaspora in Israel helps to maintain good ties between Russia and Israel. Fourth, it is expected that Russia will continue its activities as one of the patron's of the Arab-Israeli peace process for her national interests since it lies to the south of Russia. Finally, Russia's increasing role in West Asia would weaken the influence of western countries, especially of US in this region.

The study applies inductive method to discuss the phenomenon in Russia-Israel increasing relationship. It also analyzes the phenomena and evaluates the Russian policy towards the state of Israel. It also employed inductive method The study predicts that decreasing role of the US in the West Asia region would help Russia to become active player in the region. With the aim to justify the argument, the study analyzes the recent developments in the West Asia region.

The study uses various primary sources for data such as the government official documents, government's reports and UN documents as well. For secondary sources, books, articles, newspaper reports and web reports have been used.

My thesis has been divided into six chapters. The chapter one, *Introduction and Research Design*, deals with the general introduction and literature review of my research work. In this chapter, I have mentioned research questions and hypotheses as well. The chapter two, *Russia-Israel relations: Political and Economic dimensions*, covers Russia's relations with the State of Israel in political and economic spheres. In this chapter, I have mainly focused on bilateral relationship between two countries in the Post-Cold war period. But for the background of the study, I have also elaborated Soviet-Israel relations during the cold war period. The chapter three, *Russia's policy towards Arab-Israel peace process*, deals with the Russia's role and actions in the Arab-Israeli peace settlement. The chapter also covers the Soviet involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflicts during the cold war period. I have sum up the involvement of two superpowers in the Arab-Israeli conflicts and elaborated how Soviet policy was being changed regarding the Arab-Israeli

conflicts. The chapter four, *Russian Diaspora in Israel*, discusses the emigration of Russian Jewish people to Israel. In this chapter, I have focused on two large waves of Soviet Jewish emigration from the former Soviet Union and also discussed the differences between the natures of two mass emigrations. The fifth chapter, *Russia-Israel relations and external factors*, discusses the external factors that influences or play as obstacle in the development of Russia-Israel relationship. In this chapter, I have discussed Russian support to the Iranian Nuclear Program and Israeli apprehension towards Israeli nuclear program. The second section of this chapter deals with the Russia's apprehension towards close relationship between Israel and the US. This is considered to be major point that prevents Russian leadership to develop full-fledged relationship with the State of Israel. The third section of this chapter discusses the recent development in the West Asia region, especially Syrian crisis, where Russian Federation has been involved directly. Although Israel has adopted neutral approach towards the Syrian crisis, it is also worrying due to the increasing influence of Russia and Iran on its northern border. The sixth chapter will conclude the study. In this chapter, I have tried to testify my hypotheses of the research work.

Chapter II

Russia-Israel relations: Political and Economic Dimensions

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the world witnessed the dramatic change in the world system. The USSR (commonly known as Soviet Union) disintegrated and split into fifteen independent states in December 1991. The Russian Federation was immediately recognized as the legitimate successor state of the Soviet Union by UN and preserved its seat at the UN Security Council as a permanent member. The new pro-Western political leadership in Moscow was warmly welcomed by the Western countries, especially by the US. But the inherited mangled state structures did not provide the mechanisms to effectively govern the land and the people. (Nizameddin 2013: 37) The Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) which emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union is totally different from the previous existing regime. The population and territorial size of the new Russian state shrunk dramatically: its population today is only two-thirds of the former Soviet Union and its economy is only one-half as large and its army is only one-fifth as large. (Kugler 2012: 159)

During the 1990s, the Russian Federation underwent extraordinary transformations. A country that was once a superpower in the bipolar world order began to seek its place in the unipolar international system. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left Russia in a state of turmoil political and economic situation marked by political instability, lack of law and order, losing control over the peripheral territory, declining economic output and increasing inflation, foreign debt, budget deficits and severe financial crisis. (Govella et. al. 2011: 2) In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian political system changed from a communist dictatorship to a multiparty democratic system in which officials are chosen by the regular elections. And Russian economy was also reshaped from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist economy based on markets and private property. Russia, in addition, withdrew its army from the Eastern Europe and other former Soviet republics, allowing them to become

independent countries. (Shleifer 2005: 151) The newly emerged state, Russian Federation has adopted a new foreign policy in the different political manner and reevaluates its relations with the rest of the world.

Russian Foreign Policy:

The foreign policy of Russia was conceived as a result of the beginning of the process of disintegration of the state system of the Soviet Union and emergence of the new sovereign state of Russia. The August 1991 coup against the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev which was failed, gave clear indications that the state system of the USSR had begun to dissolve. It is also interesting to note that after August coup of 1991, Russia officially declared itself as a successor state of the Soviet Union, a claim that was resented by the other Former Soviet Union (FSU) republics, particularly Ukraine. However, the real beginning of the Russian foreign policy must be traced back to the date of the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union, that is to say, December 25, 1991. (Imam 2001: 1-3)

Since the disintegration of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the bi-polar world order had been collapsed. The emergence of the 'Unipolar' international system and the new strategic world order had deeply influenced the formation of the Russian foreign policy. In the new unipolar world order, Russian policy-makers faced many-sided challenges and reacted in increasingly ad hoc fashion. In this connection, the impact of the domestic factors was clearly visible in the Russian policy-making and its implementation, as usual in any other country. But what was unusual was the *degree* to which Russian foreign policy became politicized. (Lo 2002: 12-13)

Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy:

The disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of a new political and state unit as Russian Federation were profound phenomena of the late 20th century. Since the beginning of the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian parliament and other government institutions became an arena for the ideological conflicts between different groups of the Russian society. The domestic political conflicts and Russia's foreign policy uncertainties were closely intertwined at that time. The effect of Russia's

domestic political conflicts had been clearly seen on its foreign policy. The USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev was replaced by Boris Yeltsin as the first President of Sovereign Russia by popular vote. Boris Yeltsin sworn in as the first democratically elected President of sovereign Russia on July 10, 1991. However, he became head of the sovereign state only on December 12, 1991, when the Russian Supreme Soviet ratified the Belavezha agreements on the disintegration of the Soviet Union. (Glinski et. al: 527-528)

Russian President Boris Yeltsin focused on Russian interests instead of the interests of the Soviet Union. During this time, foreign policy formulation has become contentious issue between the different groups in the Russian Parliament. During the first year of Yeltsin presidency, the debate over formulation of foreign policy continued in the same vein as that had existed under Mikhail Gorbachev. The two major group were seen at that time- the first group, generally referred to as Atlanticists, wants to integrate Russia with the western world and sees Russia's interests were tremendously linked to the western world. The second groups, generally referred to as Eurasianists, are those who were highly suspicious of the western world in general and the US in particular. The second group was more complex in nature and it was a combination of neo- communists, Russian nationalists/ fascists and interest groups (mainly in the arms industry) who were cautious of reforms and who had been pursued Russian leadership about western conspiracies to undermine their country. For example, a major number of Russian nationalist did not wish to associate with either European or Asian cultures but regarded itself as superior to both. (Nizameddin 1999: 83-86)

The leaders of the Russian Federation chose 'special path' for the country- an idea that has arisen periodically in Russian socio-political discourse since the 19th century. The first tendency that tried to outline the 'special path' for Russia in world politics was *neo-Eurasianism*. This tendency was arisen in reaction to the Atlanticists approach that was dominant in the Russian foreign policy during the early years of Yeltsin presidency. The basic features of Atlanticists approach are follows: (1) the national interests do not play decisive role in the foreign policy or in world politics; (2) the crucial role in international politics is played by international law and international organizations; (3)

the West is Russia's natural partner, and hence Russia cannot accept the concept of a multipolar world; and (4) the main threats to Russia come from the East, not from the West. (Kubyshev et. al. 2012: 7-8)

The Russian leadership got disappointed when it became clear that the West was not interested to accept Russia into its economic and political organizations and did not regard Russia as a natural partner in the world politics, either an equal or a junior one. Then a new search began within the Russian political leadership that would offer an alternative concept to the Atlanticism. The search came out in the form of neo-Eurasianism- a unique mixture of geopolitics with the so-called civilizational approach. Despite many theoretical and political differences among themselves, the neo-Eurasianists were, unanimously, attributed a special historical mission to Russia. The neo-Eurasianists opined that Russia, by virtue of its geopolitical (Eurasian) position and its special historical-cultural development, was destined to be a bridge between two civilizations- East and West. Therefore, Russia combines the features of both civilizations within it and naturally assumes the role of intermediary. (Kubyshev et. al. 2012: 7-8)

The above two schools of thought- Eurasianism and Atlanticism can be subdivided into more specific ideological groups. A famous Russian writer Alexei G Arbatov (1993) wrote in his article that most western observers identified three major rival groups in the contemporary Russian domestic politics: reformers, reactionaries and centrists, further sub-divided into many sub-factions and groups. In contrast to western writers, he identified four major groups which existed during the political developments (1991-1993) in Russia, who were affecting or trying to affect the Russia's foreign policy. These groups were: pro-western group, moderate liberals, centrist and moderate conservatives, and neo-communists and nationalists. They vary in their numbers, their political, ideological and institutional motivations, and the channels through which they conduct their influence. (Arbatov 1993: 9)

Russia's Policy towards West Asian Region

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, new independent states have been emerged in the Transcaucasia and Central Asia that keeps Russia physically away from the West Asia Region. With the emergence of new states on Russia's southern border, six of them Muslim, the Russian leadership faced a series of new challenges in its dealings with the West Asia countries. Russia's priorities towards West Asia region have also been affected since the emergence of former Soviet Republics as independent states. Russia's foreign policy towards West Asia became an issue in the Russia's domestic politics as a number of conflicting interest groups sought to influence Russia's policy in the West Asia. Russian President Boris Yeltsin, in a response to right-wing Russian Parliament (Duma), sought to tailor Russia's policy towards this region at least to some degree to satisfy his critics in parliament. However, President Putin did not have to face this problem because he was working with much more supportive Duma and his nationalist policies were in tune with the majority of the Duma. (Freedman 2001: 206)

In the most democratic countries, domestic politics play a significant role in the making of foreign policy. Russia is a democratic country consisted of different ideological groups in the Russian Parliament (Duma). Russia's domestic politics have had played central role in the formulation of the Russian foreign policy, not only towards the West Asia region, but the whole world as well. The impact of Russia's domestic politics in the making of foreign policy towards the West Asia region is clearly illustrated by the shift of Russian policy from a strong pro-western tilt in 1992 to a highly nationalist tend in 1996. (Smith 2002: 1)

Russian policy-makers began to favor a Russian course that protected its traditional interests, particularly in333333 the West Asia. Vladimir Lukin, Chairman of parliament's foreign affairs committee, pointed out that Russia had deep and historic interest with West Asian countries, which needed to be protected and avoid regional imbalances in this region. By protecting the Russian interests in this region, it can also prevent the disruption of social and political balance inside Russia itself. Lukin referred especially to Turkey and Iran, added that Russia's primary interest lies in preventing open conflict with third world countries for influence in the power vacuum of Central Asia and

the Transcaucasia. Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev's policy of neglecting third world in general and West Asia in particular were highly criticized by senior Russian political figures. (Nizameddin 1999: 84) Aleksei Pushkov interpreted Kozyrev's policy in the following way: "Russia should obediently follow the US. (.....) This was the source of Kozyrev's idea of a strategic partnership that assumed a subordinate role for Moscow in matters of world politics. In exchange for Russia's consent to be America's younger brother, Washington was expected to provide financial assistance, a flow of investment, and technological modernization." (Nizameddin 1999: 84)

The Russian leadership has long desired to return to this important volatile region. In November 1994, Yeltsin's then envoy to the West Asia, Viktor Posuvalyuk, outlined Russia's views on the West Asia. "Russia is a close neighbor of the near east and Gulf region. Russia has built major power stations, plants and dams- unique dams in the region and there are many Russians there – there are 800000 former Russians and former Soviet citizens in Israel. Over 100000 families in the Arab world are related to families in Russia. Almost 20 million Russian Muslims regularly visit Mecca in their tens of thousands." The Russian foreign policy community's sentiment that Russia should be recognized as a great power provides a further reason why Russia should play an active independent role in the West Asia. (Smith 2002: 1) In April 1994, Posuvalyuk outlined Russian policy goals as follows: "Russia as a great power has two key roles with regard to the West Asia. Firstly it is a close neighbor, a major power with very broad interests, economic, political, spiritual, and religious and of course military. Its second role is as a permanent member of the security council and a co-sponsor alongside the USA in the West Asia peace process." (Smith 2002: 1)

The West Asia region is once again gained importance among Russian policy-makers in the post-Cold war period. Russia's withdrawal from the region, symbolized by the 1989 pullout from Afghanistan, has been reversed. Moscow has reestablished political ties with its former allies such as Syria; reestablish diplomatic relations with Israel after a long chilled relationship from 1967 to 1991; sees Turkey as a partner in the region; maintains a rich but complex relationship with Iran; and promotes trade with energy rich countries, from Algeria and Libya to the Gulf States. In the consideration of

her objectives, the Russian Federation formulates her foreign policy towards West Asia region. Russia's principal objectives are to advance its economic interests and to counter threats to Russia's national security. (Trenin 2010: 3)

Russia's interest in the West Asia region can be described in the following terms: geopolitical, economic, security and cultural. In geopolitical terms, Russia is interested to build a power bloc under her supremacy and aims to be the principal outside player in the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, that is just north to the West Asia region. Russia is interested to maintain its influence in the West Asia region due to its geostrategic location and proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. In the wake of the first Gulf War and the invasion of the Afghanistan and Iraq by the US led forces, Moscow feared that the increase of US military presence in the region pose a potential security threat to Russia. Therefore, Russia sought to take advantage of West Asia governments' unhappiness with the US and EU policy in the region. (Trenin 2010: 5; Katz 2015: 1)

In geo-economic terms, Russia, as a leading energy producer, sees the oil and gas producing countries of the West Asia both as partners and competitors at the same time. Since Russia's economy is heavily depend on the oil and gas export revenues, it shares an interest with oil-exporting Arab countries to maintain the oil price at high level and it also regulates competition in the gas market. For example, Russia persuades Iran, to export her gas to eastern side such as to India and Pakistan, instead of western side to Europe. Gazprom sees the Nabucco project, a gas pipeline from the Caspian to Europe, as a direct competitor of its own south stream plan, and wants to make sure Nabucco has no commitments from the Caspian gas producers. Russian companies have also signed several projects with the West Asian countries such as Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Libya and Algeria as well in oil and gas sectors. Besides of energy sector, Russia is also cooperating with Israel in information technology, communication, energy, diamond trade and military technology. (Katz 2015: 2; Trenin 2010: 6)

In security terms, Russia is worry about the emerging religious extremism in West Asian region. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there is no wall separating between Russian Muslims and their brethren in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Arab world. The continuing religious and political turbulence within the Muslim world spread

radical ideas and militants from the West Asia to the Russian north Caucasus, the central Russian republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, and the post-Soviet Central Asia. The bitter experience of the two Chechen wars compelled Russian leaders to take attention towards this region. Regarding Iran, Russia does not want to see it as nuclear state, albeit Russia support Iranian nuclear program for the peaceful use. Russia has suggested that Iranian nuclear program should be completely monitored by the international atomic energy agency (IAEA) that would keep Iran's nuclear program certifiably peaceful. Russia warned US and its allies that any military attack against Iran would delay the Iranian nuclear program, but not destroy it and make sure Iran would emerge as a nuclear-weapon state in the future. In cultural terms, Russia and Israel has a close cultural link. Nearly 20% populations of Israel are Russian-speaking and they have immigrated from Russia and other former Soviet Republics, possessing as a cultural bridge between two countries. Finally, Russia is taking interest in the region due to the US presence in this region. Russian leaders have, severally, stated that they want to revive its relationship with the old allies of the former Soviet Union in this region and make an alternative to the US. (Trenin 2010: 3-6)

The "Arab Spring" triggered an intensification of Russian policy in the region. Assessments in Russia of causes of the uprisings were extremely mixed. Although the majority of Russia's experts emphasized the domestic causes of the uprisings, there were also perceptions that any anti-government action was somehow or other organized with Western assistance. These perceptions were shaped above all by the "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space (Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan), whose objective, many in Russia believed, was to remove these states from the sphere of Russia's influence, completely diminishing this influence even in regions of vital interests, thereby dealing a blow to Russian security. (Zvyagelskaya 2013: 33-34)

Russia-Israel Relations: mutual interests

During the Cold war period, three main factors were dominating the nature of the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and Israel. These were: the emigration of the Soviet Jews; the strategic relationship between Israel and the US, and the security concern of the Soviet Union. However, in the post-cold war period, the issues of trade,

cultural relations and even military cooperation became increasingly important between Russia and Israel. (Freedman 2000: 1)

There are several reasons that propelled Russia to enhance its relationship with the State of Israel. These interests are basically three-fold. The primary interest is economic, with trade between both countries reached to approximately \$650 million in 1996 made Israel second largest trading partner in the West Asia after Turkey. The trade includes Israeli supplies of agricultural and high-tech goods to Russia, joint projects such as a \$300 million Negev oil shale plant and a \$150 million Dead Sea magnesium extraction plan, and joint cooperation in military technology etc (Freedman 1998: 148-149).

The second major Russian interest in Israel is diplomatic one. A good tie with Israel enables Russia to play or at least appear to play, a major role in the Arab- Israeli peace process and Yeltsin was successful in this effort until April 1996, when he unsuccessfully sought to mediate the Israeli-Lebanese conflict as independent broker. The third Russian interest is a cultural one, with more than 750000 Jews immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, almost all of them Russian-speaking. Russian is now the third most widely spoken language in Israel (after Hebrew and Arabic). Israel has the largest Russian Diaspora outside the former Soviet Union, and there are extensive cultural ties between the two countries. This complicates Russia's role in the West Asia with many ethnic Russians and wealthy Russian citizens residing or living in Israel. (Freedman 1998: 148-149)

Israel was also interested to establish good relationship with Russia for many reasons. From the Israeli point of view there are four major interests. The first and most important interest of Israel is to maintain the steady flow of immigration of Jews from the Russia, which has provided Israel with a large number of scientists and engineers. The second interest of Israel is to prevent the export of nuclear weapons to Israel's neighboring countries such as Libya, Syria, Iran and Iraq, as well as to convene Russia to limit supply of conventional weapons to these countries. The third interest is to develop trade relations with Russia, which ultimately help both countries on the path of development. Finally, Israel hopes to see Russian diplomatic position in the West Asia

and, if possible, it [Russia] pursued its erstwhile ally, Syria, to be more flexible in reaching a peace agreement with Israel. (Freedman 1998: 149)

Russia- Israel relations in the Cold War Period

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the relationship between Israel and the Soviet Union (until 1991) and then Russia have been reportedly complex. In May 1948, the Soviet Union supported the creation of State of Israel and provided military aids to Israel against Arab countries. But in February 1953, Soviet Union broke up diplomatic relationship after the incident of bomb explosion in premises of the Soviet embassy. However, the diplomatic relationships were restored in July 1953 after the demise of Stalin in March 1953. In 1967, the diplomatic relationships between the two countries were broke up once again, and were not fully restored until the end of Gorbachev era in September 1991. (Freedman 2000: 1)

In order to understand the twists and turns of the relationship between the Soviet Union and Israel during the cold war period, three main factors need to taken into account: the exodus of Soviet Jewry, Israel's close relationship with the US, and the security concerns of the Soviet Union. (Freedman 2000: 1)

Stalin Era, 1948-1953

The Soviet Union's decision to support the UN partition plan for Palestine and establishment of an independent Jewish state surprised the world leaders. The USSR officially endorsed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine during the discussion on the UNSCOP (United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) report in the fall of 1947. While the majority of the committee members supported the partition, some committee members recommended for a unified Arab-Jewish state. Soviet representative Semen Tsarapkin, in his speech on October 13, 1947, rejected the minority report as "impracticable." He pointed out that "relations between Arabs and Jews had reached such a state of tension that it had become impossible to reconcile their points of view on the solution of the problem." (Smolansky 1986: 68; Ro'I 1980: 84)

Despite the traditional ideological hostility towards Zionism and Stalin's anti-Semitic attitude, the Soviet spokesperson in the United Nations voted for the partition of Palestine and creation of independent Jewish and Arab states in the fall of 1947. Stalin not only voted in the favor of the partition but also give strong diplomatic support to the State of Israel. In May 1948, when the Jewish State proclaimed its independence, the Soviet Union became first country to give de jure recognition to the State of Israel. Moreover, Soviet recognition was de jure, not just de facto as in the case of the US. Moscow also provided military support (via communist Czechoslovakia) to the State of Israel when it was attacked by the Arab neighbors after declaring its independence on May 14, 1948. (Freedman 2000: 1-2; Safran 1974: 160-161)

Vladislav Zubok has described Soviet factor in the establishment of the State of Israel as the "Stalin factor." Without the Soviet Union angle, it is unimaginable to imagine how Israel could have emerged so successfully in 1948, at least in a diplomatic way. While the anti- Semitic waves were rising in the Moscow, eliminating Jews from the military, security apparatus and the party institutions and also shutting down Yiddish-language cultural institutions in the Soviet Union, Moscow was trying to ally with the Zionist movement. Why? There are several reasons to understand Stalin's foreign policy towards Israel. (Zubok 2009: 74-75)

First is the geopolitical factor, inspired by the Marxist-Leninist worldview. A French scholar Laurent Rucker wrote, "Moscow concluded that if the Soviet Union was to succeed in weakening Great Britain in the West Asia, the Zionist movement was the only means of doing so." The soviet leaders and Joseph Stalin believed that Zionist movement was one of many movements of national liberation in the "gray zone" between the imperialist powers and the Soviet Union. And this movement could and should be supported by the Soviet Union as a tool to undermine the British Empire in the region. At the same time, Moscow expected to do it without bringing the US into the region. Second factor is the nature of Stalinist realism. Stalin's policies in the West Asia were a mixture of Marxist-Leninist assumptions with the cynical soviet realism, based on the idea of the immorality of world politics. Third and final reason was the impact of Stalin's personality and the impact of his cult on policy making. Stalin himself was a mysterious figure and

he could not be measure by simplistic measurements. If we consider Stalin only in one dimension as his attitude towards Soviet Jews, we will never predict his actions on the Palestine issue in 1947-48. (Zubok 2009: 74-75)

The security concerns of the USSR might be another main reason behind its support to the state of Israel. While Great Britain was seeking to establish an alliance of Arab states allied to London, the Jews in Palestine were engaged in guerrilla warfare against the British who were preventing Jewish survivors of the holocaust from entering to the Palestine. Stalin saw the Jewish community in Palestine as an ally in preventing the British from creating a bloc of Arab states near the southern border of the Soviet Union. Indeed, a Russian diplomat openly acknowledged that “the socialism of the Yishuv (the Jewish community of Palestine) was not the socialism of the Soviet Union but that, nevertheless, Moscow was prepared to support the Yishuv if it promised not to allow either Britain or the US to have military bases in it.” (Freedman 2000: 2)

But the harmonious relationship between Soviet Union and Israel could not last longer. The triumphant visit of Golda Meir, Israel’s first ambassador to the Soviet Union led to a huge rally of Jewish community in the Moscow. This rally may have discouraged Stalin, as did Israel’s request to allow soviet Jews to emigrate. The question of Jewish emigration was the central point in the Soviet-Israel relationship until 1991. The Soviet-Israeli relationship began to chill in June 1950, when Israel sided with the US against the Soviet Union over the issue of North Korean invasion of South Korea. The US had also given a major loan to Israel in 1949 in order to get it away from the Soviet influence. The deteriorating relationship between USSR and Israel made worse by Stalin’s murder of Soviet Jews after a series of show trials in Prague and Kiev. The so-called Doctor’s Plot angered Joseph Stalin and he threatened of a major pogrom against Soviet Jews. The Israeli government strongly condemned in January 1953 of Stalin’s policy towards Soviet Jews. And finally, diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel were broken off, following the incidence of explosion of a bomb in the garden of Soviet Embassy in Tel Aviv in February 1953 possibly thrown by an Israeli protesting against Stalin’s policy towards Soviet Jews. (Freedman 2000: 2)

Khrushchev Era, 1953-1964

In the mid-1953, the domestic and international situation had set stage to restore diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin died in March 1953 and the Korean War ended in July 1953 which provoked tension between USSR and Israel. Following some informal talks, the diplomatic relationships between two countries were resumed on July 21, 1953. As part of agreement to renew diplomatic ties, the State of Israel committed itself not to join any anti-Soviet pact, treaty or arrangement. In December 1953, Soviet Union and Israel pact a deal of oil-for-citrus barter trade agreement, as per Israel could import Soviet oil in sizable quantities. This was an important deal because, as a result of blockade of Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran, Israel was entirely cut off from the oil fields in the Persian Gulf and it had to import oil from as far away as the US. Thus, in effect, Soviet Union was instrumental in helping Israel circumvent the Arab economic boycott. (Safran 1974: 166)

In June 1954, the diplomatic relationships between the two countries were upgraded as the Israeli legation in Moscow and Soviet legation in Tel Aviv were raised to embassy level. In addition, the Soviet ambassador presented his credentials in Jerusalem, the capital, rather than in Tel Aviv. The Soviet Union was, after the Netherlands and Chile, the third country and the first superpower of some consequence to do so. Due to unwillingness shown by other major countries to recognize Jerusalem as the country's capital in the light of UN internationalization resolution, the Jerusalem issue is crucial for Israel. The Soviet Union had shown her guts to do so. (Safran 1974: 166)

While the Soviet Union had shown her willingness to restore good relations with Israel, yet some strategic questions were soon to cause difficulties in the Soviet-Israeli relationship. In the Arab-Israeli dispute, the Soviet Union did not side with Israel. On a number of occasions- such as the Nahalin incident, the Lake Huleh conflict, the follow up on the 1952 resolution of free passage in the Suez Canal- the Soviet Union favored the Arab point of view in the UN. (Safran 1974: 166)

The Western countries' attempts to establish an alliance in the West Asia region was even more worrisome to the Soviet Union. With the help of the US, The Great

Britain formed an alliance in the West Asia namely Baghdad Pact (CENTO). The Baghdad Pact comprising- Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Great Britain, was officially signed in 1955. The Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser was leading the Arab opposition to the Baghdad Pact, whose main Arab rival, Nuri Said, Iraqi PM, was the main supporter of the Baghdad Pact. Nikita Khrushchev, general secretary of the CPSU, grabbed this opportunity and saw Egypt as an ally against the West in the West Asian region. Moscow ignored the fact that Egypt was an enemy of Israel and sought a chance to score a major victory in the competition with the US for influence over the third world. Consequently, Khrushchev agreed to supply arms (planes and tanks) to Egypt which was seen as a strategic threat by Israel. Israeli-Egyptian relations deteriorated rapidly. In October 1956, with the support of France and England, Israel launched an attack on Egypt. Israel was not only seeking to destroy the arms supplied by Moscow (again via Czechoslovakia) but also wanted to end Egyptian-backed terrorist attacks on Israel's western border. Israel also fought for the opening of Straits of Tiran for Israeli shipping which had been blocked by the Egypt. Both the US and Soviet Union denounced the joint attack of Israel, France and Britain on Egypt and asked for immediate withdrawal. Following the 1956 war, Soviet Union increasingly aligned itself with the Arab world against Israel. With regard to Israel, Khrushchev not only maintained diplomatic relations with it but also began to improve internal situation of Soviet Jews as he sought support in the West for his growing confrontation with China. (Freedman 2000: 3-4)

Brezhnev Era, 1964-82

During the Brezhnev leadership (1964-1982), the soviet-Israeli relationship was perhaps gone through with most contradictory phase. On the one hand, diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel were broken following the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War of 1967. On the other hand, he continued to allow the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. The main objective of Brezhnev's emigration policy was to improve ties with the US, not with Israel, because Soviet Union hoped for a major trade and strategic arms agreements with the US. Indeed, Soviet-American relations were sharply deteriorated after the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Soviet Jewish emigration was also drop-off rapidly. The Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relationships that had

begun under Nikita Khrushchev were called off during the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. (Freedman 2000: 4-5)

From 1967 to 1991, there was no diplomatic relations between Soviet Union and Israel. During that period, Soviet-Israeli relations were hinged on two external factors. First, the Soviet Union was restrained by its strong ties with the Arab countries who were de facto allies of the Soviet Union. Although Soviet Union had never set up any military-political union with any of the Arab countries, but these countries opposed Soviet Union for the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Zionist State. Secondly, at the same time, there was an influential factor of Russian Jews who left for Israel earlier. From the Jerusalem's point of view, absence of diplomatic relation between the two countries was good and preferable opportunity for the Soviet Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Israel demanded that Soviet Jews have the opportunity to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Over the time, especially after the adoption of the notorious Jackson-Vanik amendment¹, the demand for emigration of the Soviet Jews became a convenient tool for the US in her anti-Soviet policies. Since the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration placed in the epicenter of the US-Soviet standoff. (Epstein 2007: 180-81)

Although there was no diplomatic relationship between the USSR and Israel, the Soviet officials never questioned the statehood and sovereignty of the State of Israel. The Soviet Union has, indeed, repeatedly insisted that neither the act of severing diplomatic relationship with Israel on June 10, 1967, nor the refusal to renew it implies any reservations regarding Israel's right of existence. In April 1975 the Soviet Union's permanent ambassador to the UN, Iakov Malik, told the Security Council that the "lasting and just peace in the West Asia which his government favored meant both to satisfy the lawful rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including its right to the creation of its own state and to grant to all states in the region the possibility of free existence and

¹ The Jackson-Vanik amendment of the Trade Act of 1974 sets a policy of free emigration in compliance with the restoration of certain specific economic benefits to a "non-market economy" (NME) country. These benefits includes access to non-discriminatory (most-favored nation) tariff status in its trade with US; access to US governmental financial facilities (export credits, export credit guarantees and investment guarantees); and its ability to conclude a bilateral trade agreement with the US. (Pregelj 2005: 2)

development". The similar views were also expressed by the CPSU general secretary Leonid Brezhnev at the 25th CPSU Congress in February 1976. (Ro'I 1979: 232-233)

Although Soviet Union had refrained from resuming diplomatic relations with Israel, it had, however, maintained numerous contacts with Israeli officials and diplomats at various levels and in various parts of the world. These contacts were existed before October 1973 but became more frequent afterwards since Soviet Union use the threat of renewing relations with Israel as a means of political leverage vis-à-vis the Arabs. (Ro'I 1979: 239) The foreign ministers of both countries held discussions at the UN occasionally during its annual meetings. And there were also unusual visits of representatives of different organizations (usually left-wing) of the two countries. The most important thing was that mass emigration of soviet Jews were allowed by the Brezhnev when there was absence of diplomatic relations in between both countries. And the ironical factor was USSR itself spearheaded a resolution in the UN General Assembly in 1975 which called "Zionism is Racism." (Freedman 2000: 5)

However, the protracted severance of diplomatic relations with Israel by Soviet Union and East European States was a major factor in Israel's isolation in the international arena. There have even been indications that the Soviet Union played an encouraging role in the breakup of relations with Israel by a considerable number of African states, beginning with Idi Amin's Uganda, a process that gathered momentum in the 1973. At the end of 1974, the Arabs began to press for Israel's exclusion from the UN and Soviet Union was again in the forefront of anti-Israel offensive. (Ro'I 1979: 244-245)

Gorbachev Era, 1985-1991

Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985. After coming to power, he initiated major domestic reforms and introduced the idea of "New Thinking" in international relations. While introducing the idea of 'New Thinking' in his speech to the United Nations in December 1985, he embraces number of propositions about the nature of international relations i.e. the world is becoming increasingly interdependent; no country would be winner in the nuclear war; human interests should take priority over the interests of any particular

class; and states' security has to be based on political rather than military means, especially in the context of US-Soviet Union relations. (Holloway 1988-1989: 66)

Gorbachev's New Thinking had a profound impact on Soviet policy towards West Asia region, which substantially altered the balance of power in the region. (Nizameddin 1999: 47) Gorbachev moved forward to expand the diplomatic dialogue with the State of Israel. Moscow's new determination to improve ties with Israel angered its Arab allies which came into light in 1987 at a state dinner with Syrian President Hafez al-Asad in the Kremlin. Syria was the Moscow's most trusted ally in the Arab world and Israel's major foe. In his speech in April 1987, in the presence of Syrian president Hafez al-Asad, Gorbachev asserted that the absence of diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel "cannot be considered normal". Gorbachev also emphasized that the Arab-Israel disputes could only be resolved through the political process not through the military means. He also convened Syria to repair its relations with the PLO and with the Iraq. Gorbachev's speech made it clear that Soviet interests, not Arab interests, would dictate Moscow's foreign policy agenda. The first official meeting between Israeli and Soviet representatives took place in Helsinki, Finland in August 1986 and the following month, Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres met at the United Nations, the first high-level meeting between Soviet and Israeli officials since 1967. Neither of these meetings accomplished much of a substantive nature, but they reflected the interest of both sides in pursuing a dialogue. (Goodman et. al. 1988: 575)

In 1989, despite the formation of a Likud-led National Unity government in Israel, its relations with the Soviet Union improved still further. The cultural and athletic interactions and other forms of "people-to-people" interactions between two countries improved further. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and newly elected Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens met officially not less than three times. However, the two countries still differed strongly over the Arab-Israeli peace process. Israel sharply protested against the Soviet sale of SU-24s to Libya, while Soviet Union negatively reacted to the Shamir peace proposal. (Freedman 1990: 18)

Finally, the Soviet Union resumed diplomatic relations with Israel on October 19, 1991, just 2 months prior to the collapse of the USSR. Gorbachev not only restores full diplomatic relations with Israel but also join with the US in co-sponsoring a UN resolution reversing the “Zionism is Racism” resolution. Moscow welcomed the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and took part in the Madrid Conference with the US held on October 30, 1991. Madrid conference provided the way for a peace process through negotiations involving Israel and its Arab neighbors such as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan as well as Palestinians. At the same time, Soviet-Syrian relations deteriorated when Gorbachev refused to give weapons to Syria it needed for military parity with Israel. It was the last negotiation in which the USSR and the US both were present; two months later the USSR collapsed and split into fifteen independent states. (Freedman 1995: 234)

Russia-Israel relations in the Post-Cold War Period

Moscow, just two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel in October 1991 making a new phase of bilateral relations. It was a long and difficult process, which may be called normalization. The first task was to create a comprehensive legal framework for Russian-Israeli relations and to identify priority areas for cooperation. The existing bilateral mechanism is based on 16 inter-governmental agreements that continue to acquire new meaning and perspective as relations develop. (Karasova 2013: 51)

Boris Yeltsin Era, 1991-1999

The most surprising transformation in Russian foreign policy towards West Asia region in the 1990s was the nature of relationship between Moscow and Tel Aviv. During the most time of the Soviet era, until Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union, Israel was considered as the member of the enemy blocs. Mikhail Gorbachev, after assuming the power, initiated to improve the relations with Israel and re-established diplomatic relations between two countries in October 1991. Boris Yeltsin persisted on the course of improving relations with Tel Aviv inherited from the Gorbachev. However, certain practical difficulties such as Arab-Israeli dispute, Israel’s close relationship with US, Russia’s close relationship with Israel’s Arab enemy- Syria, Iran, Iraq and Israel’s

aggressive policies towards its Arab neighbors, seemed to re-impose themselves with the passing of time, which by 1996 was no longer concealed by Russia. (Nizameddin 2009: 108)

Yeltsin's tenure as Russian President, in terms of Russia-Israel relations, can be divided into three major stages: First, the honeymoon period of Russia-Israeli relations lasted from December 1991 to December 1993, when President Yeltsin worked to improve the relationship in spite of rising domestic opposition from communists and ultranationalists; second, from December 1993 to December 1995, when Russian-Israeli relations, particularly in the areas of trade and diplomacy, developed despite Yeltsin adopted a much more nationalistic foreign policy; third, started from January 1996, when Yeltsin turned to the right and appointed Yevgeny Primakov as Russia's foreign minister began to cast a chill on the Russian- Israeli relationship. During this period, economic and military relations between two countries began to improve, although political relations had their ups and downs. (Freedman 1998: 148)

First stage:

After assuming the President office, Boris Yeltsin initially showed little interest in the West Asia affairs. He, initially, devoted his time and energy to consolidate his position in the domestic politics as well as international affairs, including its veto power in the UN Security Council and then gaining approval from the West, particularly from the US. Regarding West Asia affairs, Boris Yeltsin tended to follow the US lead in all issues. In terms of Russian-Israeli relations, the strong rapprochement that took place in the last few years of the Soviet Union continued under Yeltsin presidency. (Freedman 1998: 150) Thus, Yeltsin priorities were made clear when he did not attend the multilateral peace talks held in Moscow in January 1992. When the multilateral peace talks began in Moscow, Russia backed Israeli demands that the PLO be excluded from the peace talks, as it happened at Madrid conference. (Freedman 1998: 150; Freedman 1995: 235)

Russia's policy of non-intervention in the West Asia conflicts that began under Gorbachev was systematically pursued by President Yeltsin in the early 1990s. Moscow's

non-intervention policy was most evident in the Arab-Israeli dispute despite Russia inheriting the official role of co-sponsor of the West Asia peace process. Consequently, Russia's retreat from the West Asia in the early Yeltsin period was a considerable factor that allowed for the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994 and the partial agreement between PLO and Israel in the September 1993 in Washington. (Nizameddin 2013: 39)

Following Madrid Peace Conference, the Russian-Israeli bilateral relations continued to improve. The Russian UN ambassador asked Israel to co-sponsor the entry of former Soviet Republics into the UN; and Natan (Anatoly) Sharansky, who immigrated to Israel and later became minister in the Israeli government, was declared innocent of all charges that he had spied for the US. In late April 1992, Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, then still an ally of Yeltsin, visited Israel and at the airport he stated that "We consider Israel a very important place because of the many Russians who now live here. They form a bridge between us that can enable us to broaden our relations." During his visit, Rutskoi signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in agriculture which, in his word, "opens vast prospects for Russo-Israeli business in agrarian sphere". (Freedman 1998: 150)

As Russian-Israeli relations deepened, the political opponents of the President Yeltsin intensified their attacks in the summer of 1993. In response, President Yeltsin dissolved the parliament "Duma" on September 21, 1993, and announced fresh election for a new parliament, a move that created a constitutional crisis and an open revolt by the political opponents' mainly communist in alliance with nationalist hardliners. Yeltsin ordered the military to mobilize tanks and heavy weaponry to confront the rebellion, which was crushed by mid-October 1993. The doomed Russian parliament that openly confronted with Yeltsin in 1993 had been elected in 1991, when Soviet political system remained overshadowed by the communist party and its constitutional privilege. In the first post-Soviet parliamentary election, which was held on December 12, 1993, Yeltsin faced major setback. Yeltsin's preferred parliamentary candidate, Yegor Gaidar, leading Russia's Choice bloc, performed badly while the opposition communists and extreme

nationalists led by newcomer Vladimir Zhirinovsky emerged as the largest groupings. (Nizameddin 2013: 40)

Second Stage:

Unlike the confrontational pattern of relations with old parliament, President Yeltsin adopted *modus Vivendi* approach with the new parliament. Thus, he removed Yegor Gaidar from his government and began to adopt more independent foreign policy of the US. Yeltsin became more assertive in protecting Russia's interests in the "near abroad" by using military and economic means. (Freedman 1995: 243)

While this flurry of diplomacy may have strengthened Yeltsin position in the domestic politics, it did not affect Russia's ties with either the US or Israel for several reasons. First, Moscow quickly abandoned the "Madrid II Plan". Second, the PLO and Israel agreed to return to the peace talks and an agreement was reached between them on May 4, 1994. Third, Israeli PM Rabin was warmly welcomed by Yeltsin and other Russian officials when he visited Moscow in April 1994 and he was also invited to deliver a lecture at the General Staff Academy in Moscow. President Yeltsin also assured Rabin that Russia would sale only defensive arms and spare parts to Syria (a Russian-Syrian military agreement had been signed on April 27, 1994) and the Russian leaders also promised Israeli PM Rabin that they would use their influence over Syria to find information about Israeli soldiers who were missing during the first Lebanon war of 1982. (Freedman 1998: 154-155)

Third Stage:

With the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Russian foreign minister in January 1996, Russia-Israel relations negatively affected. In February 1996, an Israeli diplomat was expelled for spying (Although British and Estonian had also been ousted). (Freedman 1998: 156) On the other hand, Israel also accused Russia of stepping up its hidden activities in the Jewish state, a charge that was denied by Russia in an unconvincing manner: "Russian intelligence officers do not do anything in Israel that their Israeli counterparts would not do in Russia". (Nizameddin 1999: 128)

After the presidential election of Russia in June 1996, Russia-Israel relations witnessed little improvement. In this election, Boris Yeltsin defeated his rival communist candidate Zuganov and reelected to the president post. Yeltsin's victory was welcomed not only by Russian Jewish community but by Israel also. Among the communists, there was an anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic group headed by Viktor Anpilov, who had warned in a TV interview just before the presidential election, that 'if Yeltsin won, the Russian people would take to the streets, and there would be pogroms'. However, the appointment of strong nationalist Alexander Lebed as Secretary of National Security Council by Yeltsin, raised concerns among Russian Jews and Israelis. (Freedman 1998: 158)

The relations between Russia and Israel improved further in January 1997. Natan Sharansky, then Israel's Minister of Trade and Industry, paid visit to Moscow, where he was warmly welcomed by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Mr. Sharansky accompanied with 70 Israeli businessmen in the hope of boosting trade relations between two countries. (Freedman 1998: 159) In this series, Israeli PM Netanyahu also paid visit to Moscow on March 10, 1997, where he was warmly welcomed by Russian president Yeltsin. Mr. Netanyahu, during his visit, held two packed meetings with Jewish leaders-one in Moscow synagogue, and the other in the Kolonny Zal. Netanyahu, in his speech, credited recent Russian immigrants to Israel as he noted that Israel, with more than a million Russian-speaking Jews, flooded with highly talented scientists, engineers and artists. He further said that "Knowledge is the Key to economic success and Russian knowledge the key to Israel's economic growth". President Yeltsin saw the Netanyahu's visit as a process of moving beyond reconciliation to real political and economic cooperation. President Yeltsin stated that "Our countries and their leaders have finished a period of biased attitudes and have energetically moved towards each other. This regards political, economic and trade relations." (Stanley 1997)

Israel has entered into negotiations with Russia to buy natural gas from Russia. Both countries have also discussed for cooperation in military technology. But the cooperation has been overshadowed by Israeli and American fears that Russia is helping Iran to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Russian foreign minister Primakov, at a press conference, denied above charges that Moscow was helping Iran to

build ballistic missiles, and he asserted that the nuclear reactor it had sold to Tehran was for peaceful purposes only and could not be used for military purposes. (Stanley 1997)

Vladimir Putin Era, 2000-2008

Vladimir Putin became Prime Minister of Russian federation in the fall of the 1999 and he became acting President on December 31, 1999, when President Boris Yeltsin resigned in a surprising move. Putin won the presidential election of March 2000 and in 2004 he was reelected for a second term lasting until May 7, 2008. During his presidential electoral campaign in 2000, he announced that he would “restore the authority of the state and to pursue democratic development”. Although these principles had been growing from last ten years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but these principles could be achieved only when liberal values took place in the country. (Leahy 2000: 633)

After assuming the President office in 2000, Vladimir Putin had formulated his foreign policy to achieve three major goals: the first objective was to restore Russia’s great power status in the world so as to prevent the US from unilaterally dominating the world; the second objective was to boost the Russian economy so as to Russia again become a great power; and the third objective was to check the Islamic radicalism in the Russian territory as well as in the world and prevent financial aids from the West Asia countries to the Chechen rebellion. (Freedman 2010) During his first term in President Office (2000-2004), Vladimir Putin carried out an upgrading of national security, military and foreign policy concepts to ensure Russia’s progress towards a multidirectional, balanced and pragmatic external strategy. (Zakaurtseva 2007: 87) The Russian foreign policy concept, signed by President Putin in June 2000 states that “Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the modern world with its great variety of interest”. The most vocal declaration of the principle of the multipolarity as directed against the West is perhaps the famous speech delivered by President Putin in February 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. In his speech, President Putin described that “unipolar world promoted by the West as a world of one master, one sovereign. The unilateral illegitimate actions of the US and its allies are detrimental to global security because they produce new conflicts

and wars, intensify the nuclear arms race, and lead to a situation where no one feels secure because no one can find refuge behind the stronghold of the international law". (Makarychev et. al. 2011: 355) The concept of multipolar world and securing Russia's position as a great power in the world was first developed by former foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996, which means that fight for a world order in which the US does not dominate unilaterally and where Russia is the one pole of power among many. (Oldberg 2010: 3)

After assuming the power, President Putin made a number of changes in Russia's domestic and foreign policies. The changes in the domestic policies of any democratic country would also affect the foreign policies of that country. Thus President Putin has tightened control at home and eliminated many oligarchs who were acting as quasi-independent actors in Russia's domestic and foreign policies. Putin's foreign policy was simply indifferent from his predecessor one, except starting a second war in Chechnya. Regarding the West Asia region, Russia's policy has been more continuity rather than change. But the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US deeply affect the Russia's West Asia policy, and prompted President Putin to significantly change its policy towards Iran and Iraq to strengthen relations with the US. (Freedman: 509)

During Putin's presidency, the State of Israel has come to play an increasingly significant role in Russia's West Asia policy. President Putin has done more than any other Russian leader to improve economic and strategic ties with Israel. (Bourtman 2006) Putin's policy towards Israel has been driven by several factors. First, fight against Islamist terrorism. While talking about the seriousness of the terror problem, President Putin has drawn parallel line between Russian and Israeli respective struggles against terrorism. Israeli PM Ariel Sharon, in November 2003, called President Putin "a true friend of Israel." Israel was one of the countries that did not criticize Putin for his military actions in Chechnya. The second important point that drives Putin's policy towards Israel is deepening economic relations between the two countries. President Putin has sought trade relations with Israel in high-tech areas including nanotechnology. The third factor that dominates Putin's policy towards Israel is diplomatic one. President Putin has sought a major role for Russia in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, hoping to replace the

West, particularly the US, as an important mediator. (Borshchevskaya 2016: 43) However, Putin's ambitions as an important broker in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process faced a major setback when Russia was formally excluded from the further meetings of Camp David II summit held between July 11, 2000 and July 25, 2000, though Putin endorsed the event and it relieve its duty as an official co-sponsor of the ongoing peace process. (Nizameddin 2013: 205)

Russian President Putin visited Israel in May 2001 with the purpose of improving bilateral relationship between the two countries. Israeli PM Sharon praised Putin for his visit and articulated that Russia's position has become more sympathetic to the Israelis than the Europeans. Except a small number of left-wing and nationalist newspapers, the attitudes of the Russians have become more flexible towards Israel. Most of the Russian media were more pro-Israeli than in Western Europe. In the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, President Putin sought to present Russia as a comrade-in-arms with the Western world and Israel for fighting against Islamist terrorism. Israel supported the Russia's vision of forming a grand alliance against Islamist terrorism, with commentators such as Ariel Cohen warning that: "The ideological expansion of radical Islam cannot be stopped without the cooperation of the US, Western Europe, Russia, India, Israel and other countries." However, President Putin forced to restrain his participation in this coalition and heed the calls of domestic interest groups to maintain good relations with the Arab and wider Muslim world. (Nizameddin 2013: 206)

Israeli PM Ariel Sharon also showed interest in the development of Russian-Israeli relationship and visited Moscow in September 2002. Mr. Sharon held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials, including Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II, and discussed on the situation in the West Asia, as well as the Arab-Israeli disputes. While Putin focused on Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, Sharon played up the issue of Islamic terrorism and radicalism as major threats to both Russia and Israel. However, President Putin welcomed Israel's decision to lift its siege of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters and repeated calls for withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities. President Putin told Sharon that "We condemn terrorism in all its

forms, and we welcome your decision to lift the siege.” He, once again, reiterated that Russia supports the US-led coalition against terrorism and consider Israel as an important member of the alliance. Sharon also replied in the same way and said that the two countries are natural allies against “the serious threat of extremist Islam.” (Krichevsky 2002: 3) During his meeting with Sharon, President Putin expressed his interest regarding the Israel’s position on the prospects of its relations with Syria and Lebanon, and spoke for the unconditional observance of UNSC Resolution 1435 adopted on Russian initiative in September 2002. He argued that implementing the principles laid out in the document would create a solid groundwork for the settlement of a wide range of West Asia problems. Both leaders had also discussed the bilateral issues i.e. political and economic relations. President Putin said that “Russian-Israeli relations were progressing in all fields of activity. The trade turnover between the countries had already reached the \$1 billion mark. Both countries had a huge potential for stepping up mutually beneficial partnership in the high-tech industries.”²

The most visible area of cooperation between Russia and Israel has been in the field of counterterrorism. Israel was one of the first nations who offered its support to Russia after the Beslan tragedy in 2004 in which almost 300 people, mostly children, were killed in a hostage standoff with Chechen rebels. Israel, which has been struggling against terrorism for many years, stands alongside the Russian people and sends its condolences. Israeli PM Ariel Sharon stated that “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”. These statements were not a break from the past. Since 1999, Israeli officials have stressed the similarity between Chechen and Palestinian Islamist terrorists, and reiterated the need to respond forcefully to terrorism more broadly. (Bourtman 2006)

The economic relations between the two countries are also improving. The trade between the countries has doubled under Putin and touched the mark of \$1.5 billion in direct trade, and over a billion in energy deals. Russians and Israelis are working together

² <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27464>

in many sectors spanning heavy industry, aviation, energy, and medicine. Since 1989, almost one million Russian-speaking people immigrated to Israel, creating a natural economic bridge between the two countries. These Russian-speaking immigrants consist of nearly 20 percent of Israel's population today. While replying to a question asked by Egyptian Newspaper Al-Ahram in April 2005, President Putin said that "Russia is not indifferent to the fate of these people [Russian-speaking people in Israel]." Many of them hold dual (Israeli and Russian) citizenship and business ties with both countries. Among the Russian immigrants to Israel have been several powerful Russian oligarchs- 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). (Bourtman 2006)

Despite improvements in the bilateral relationship between the two countries, significant differences remain unsolved. Russia does not consider Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organization and even President Putin had invited Hamas delegations to visit Russia in March 2006 and early March 2007. Both delegations were led by Khaled Mashal, who has a reputation as a bitter foe of Israel. Israel reacted to those visits quite strongly. The Israelis reasoned that "if Russia claims it doesn't speak to terrorists but destroys them instead, why should it invite the leader of world's most bloody terrorist organizations for talks?" (Epstein 2007: 181-183)

The other major differences between two countries have included Russia's support to the Iranian nuclear program and arms sales to Syria that ultimately could fall into the Hezbollah's hand. Russia's intervention in the Syrian Crisis recently increases Israeli concerns on this front. Disappointed with US policies in the region, the State of Israel in recent years has been working on improving relations with Russia and regional Sunni powers. (Borshchevskaya 2016: 44)

Dmitry Medvedev Era, 2008-2012

Dmitry Medvedev took the charge of Russian President on May 7, 2008. After assuming the office, he continues the foreign policy started by the previous President Vladimir Putin. Medvedev had not been able to put himself as world-class leadership

with his new foreign policy concept. Actually none of the Medvedev's ideas were new, all of his ideas were initially started by his predecessor Vladimir Putin. (Bovt: 20) Medvedev appointed Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister and followed the same path started by him as President. President Medvedev announced a Russian Foreign Policy Concept in 2008 just like Putin had announced a Foreign Policy Concept in the year of 2000. President Medvedev also launched a new National Security Strategy in 2009 and a Defense Doctrine in 2010. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept, 2008 primarily dealt with Russia's national interests and its position in the world. Medvedev mainly focused on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. In his Foreign Policy Concept, He questioned on the unipolarity of the world system and challenges the dominating position of the US. Medvedev called for a more democratic and 'multi-polar' world order. He mainly focused on the security of the territorial areas of the country and worked for the strengthening of Russia's position in the world. He also calls for the democratic rights of the 'Russians' living abroad. However, there is little place in the Foreign Policy Concept for democracy and human rights in the Western sense. (Oldberg 2010: 2-3)

Regarding the matter of national security, Russia discouraged the use of unilateral actions, which, according to the national security strategy's document, only destabilize the international situation and ultimately weaken the principles of international law. In other words, Russian Federation opposes the practice of unilateralism and promotes the principles of multipolarity and multilateralism in the international relations that will form one of the main pillars of Russian foreign policy in the future. Furthermore, Foreign Policy Concept 2008 also mentioned Russia's relations with NATO; where Russia is on the one hand ready to cooperate with NATO with the NATO-Russia Council. On the other hand, according to Foreign Policy Concept 2008, Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably opposed the proposal of admitting Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance. (Tichy 2014: 536)

The Russian administration under Medvedev saw Israeli-Palestinian issue as a low cost opportunity for gaining recognition and improving relations with the Muslim countries in the West Asia and Central Asia as well. While addressing to the Arab League, President Medvedev said that "The key to overall normalization in the West Asia

is the Palestinian issue and ending the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab land.” On the ground, Russia advocated for the multipolarity via UN-backed diplomatic actions to reduce the US influence in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. (Olena Bagnomoldavsky 2013: 129)

Vladimir Putin’s period (from 2012)

Vladimir Putin captured Russian President’s office once again in May 2012. He released the Russian Foreign Policy Concept in February 2013 to indicate the basic principles, priorities, goals and objectives of the foreign policy of his government. The new Foreign Policy Concept received little attention in the West since it was just a reiteration of the previous foreign policy concepts. Yet this foreign policy concept offers important insight into how Russian Federation views the international situation that has changed considerably since the 2008. As Putin noted when he presented it, the concept takes into account the global financial crisis and instability in the West Asia and North Africa since the Arab uprising in 2011. (Monaghan 2013: 2)

President Putin has outlined three principles goals while his third term in the President office. These are: 1) to consolidate Russian sphere of influence in the ‘near abroad’- neighboring countries such as Ukraine that were part of the Soviet Union once. 2) To tighten domestic political and economic control. 3) To restore Russian influence in the West Asia region where Moscow wants to fight Islamic terrorism, leverage its economic and political interests, and compete with the US. (McLaughlin 2015: 3)

Russia’s current foreign policy towards the West Asia region is somewhat limited, while the issues related to West Asia countries continue to occupy an important place in its diplomatic rhetoric. Russia’s interest in the regional developments of the West Asia region has intensified. Russia was one among the 138 members of the UN General Assembly who voted in favor of upgrading the Palestinians’ status to a non-member

observer state. During the Operation Pillar of Defense³, Russian Minister of Foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov informed Saleh Raafat, Special Representative of the Palestinian Authority and member of the PLO Executive Committee, that Russia made multifaceted efforts to normalize the situation. Russian President Vladimir Putin criticized the actions of the Western countries in the West Asia and North Africa during the Arab spring and called it “like an elephant in a china shop.” (Bagno and Moldavsky 2013: 122)

In terms of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Russia adopted the classical notion of realpolitik as a matter to be exploited for its own political and, ultimately, economic advantage. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is thus a good illustration of Russia’s pragmatic opportunism. Therefore, attempts to discuss peacemaking initiatives by Moscow will likely resume in 2013, along with the calls to schedule the Helsinki Conference on the establishment of the WMDFZ (Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone) in the West Asia. (Bagno and Moldavsky 2013: 130)

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Israel in June 2012 and participated in the event dedicating the monument marking the Russian Red Army’s victory over the Nazis in the World War II. By participating in the event, Putin showed his solidarity with Jewish People. (Idan 2013: 103) During his meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres in Jerusalem, Putin said that “It is in Russia’s national interest to provide peace and tranquility in the West Asia, peace and tranquility to the Israeli people. It is not by accident that the Soviet Union was among the initiators and supported the creation of the state of Israel.” Putin here conveniently left out Stalin’s quick policy reversal after Israel aligned with the West. (Borshchevskaya 2016: 43)

Economic relationship between Russia and Israel

Since the revival of the diplomatic relationship between Russia and Israel in October 1991, both countries started to develop full-fledged relationship. Despite the many breaches in their affairs, both countries are actively developing bilateral economic

³ Operation Pillar of Defense was an eight-day Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip that lasted from November 14 to November 21, 2012. The Israeli operation launched with the assassination of Ahmed Jabari, commander of Hamas’s armed forces in the Gaza Strip. (Brom 2012: 7)

relations. The two countries are economically well-connected and they have large potential to develop it. The two countries have developed relations in many sectors including trade, business, innovation, hi-technology, and pharmaceuticals etc.

Trade and Economic relations

In order to evaluate the economic and trade relationship between Russia and Israel, including trends and potential opportunities, basic facts and figures of Russia's economy and foreign trade should be reviewed. In terms of foreign trade, Russia is the world's 13th largest export economy. In 2015, Russia exported \$316 billion and imported \$184 billion, resulting in a positive trade balance of \$132 billion. As per 1992 revision of the harmonized system classification, the top exports of Russia are Crude Petroleum (\$90.1 billion), Refined Petroleum (\$57.5 billion), Petroleum Gas (\$25.4 billion), Coal Briquettes (\$10.4 billion) and Raw Aluminium (\$7.02 billion). While the Russian top imports lists includes Cars (\$7.73 billion), Packaged Medicaments (\$7.01 billion), Vehicle Parts (\$5.05 billion), Computers (\$4.05 billion) and Planes, Helicopters, and Spacecraft (\$3.45 billion)⁴.

Since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Israel, the economic relations between them boost up and marked by dynamic development. Though the trade between two countries has increased significantly, the trade value between two countries was approximately \$500 million only in 1997, a relatively small amount. (Stanley 1997) The trade turnover between Russia and Israel rose by 50 percent during between 1995 and 2000, amounting to over \$1 billion. (Kreutz 2007: 71) The estimated value of the overall exchange of commodities between two countries has reached \$3.57 billion in a year in 2013. In 2013, the data shows that the predominant commodities in Russian exports to Israel are mineral raw materials (35.5%), diamonds, ferrous and non-ferrous metals (44%), foods and agricultural products, mainly cereals (12.6%), timber, pulp and paper products (2.6%), and oil and petroleum products. On the other hand, Russian imports from Israel are dominated by foods and agricultural products (54%) heavy engineering, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, machinery and equipment,

⁴ <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/rus/>

chemical industry products, and agricultural technology. (Trofimova, 2015: 461; Fedorchenko 2015: 67) The State of Israel is mainly interested to access to Russia's market and to her fossil fuels, while Russia is mainly interested in harnessing Israeli technologies for the industrial development of the country. (Rabkin 2012: 200-201)

However, it is business that can create favorable atmosphere for the long term cooperation between the two countries and avail the strategic level of interaction. The business plays a key role in the development of social life as well as political life. The business helps the social development of the society through the economic functions. And the political aspect of business and management is also very important. The political life of every society is a reflection of clashes and conflicts of concrete interests of economic nature. Accordingly, the business community such as big entrepreneurs and top managers has a great say in the political decisions. (Oulin 2015: 61)

The Israel's FDIs into Russia are growing constantly, from practically zero in 2008 to \$83 million in 2013 and \$39 million in the first two quarters of 2014 (according to the data of the central bank). By the end of 2013, the volume of the accumulated Israeli FDIs in Russia reached \$438 million. The flow of Russian FDIs to Israel also increased, from \$50 million in 2007 to \$158 million in 2013 and \$168 million in the first two quarters of 2014. By the end of 2013, the volume of the accumulated Russian direct investments into Israel amounted to \$471 million. In addition, Israeli companies have participated in many joint projects with Russian private business. Overall, more than 900 Israeli enterprises are registered in Russian federation. To improve the organization of investment cooperation, the Israeli government allocated \$75 million to the Export Insurance Agency to support the activity of its investors in the Russian market. (Trofimova, 2015: 462)

Russian President Vladimir Putin expected that the establishment of free trade area between Israel and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) could promote Russia's economic ties with Israel. After the meeting with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Moscow on June 7, 2016, President Putin addressed a press conference and said, "I am sure that the establishment of a free trade area between the EAEU and Israel may serve as an incentive for developing business ties.....we recently talked about this

with our EAEU partners in Astana, and substantive negotiations on this account will be launched this year.”⁵ Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev also reiterated the same thing during his visit to Israel and Palestine in the month of November 2016.⁶

However, the stagnation phase also visible in the Russian-Israeli economic relationship. In 2009, the commodity turnover between Russia and Israel fall to \$1.68 billion in a year. The sign of decreasing commodity turnover in 2009 was due to fall in oil prices and the effect of global crises of 2008-2009. As well as Russia’s different views with Israel on certain issues like Israeli-Palestinian relations, status of Hamas, Russia’s connections with Arab countries also contribute to the stagnation of the Russian-Israeli economic relations. (Trofimova, 2015: 460-61)

However, Israel is far behind from being the main trading partner of Russia as it occupies 37th place among the Russia’s foreign trade counteragents. Israel’s share in the foreign trade of the Russian federation is just 0.4% only. But Russia’s share in the trade turnover of the Israel is somewhat higher, 1.4%. However, the trade dynamics shows that the economic cooperation between both countries is actively expanding and its potential has not been exhausted. (Trofimova, 2015: 461)

Cooperation in Hi-Tech and Innovation Technology

During the Soviet period, the basic research in many fields was among the best in the world. In modern world, Russia has also attempted to create R&D clusters such as Skolkovo Innovation Centre. With the purpose to fulfill this mission, Israeli experience will be beneficial for Russia in such fields as technology commercialization; system of the state support of innovations; dual-use technologies operation; international R&D cooperation system; and, management in the fields of innovations. (Maryasis 2015: 50-51)

⁵https://rbth.com/news/2016/06/08/eaeu-israel-free-trade-agreement-could-boost-economic-ties-putin_601197

⁶<http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?y=2016&m=11&d=11&id=714336>

There are four main reasons that favors Russia-Israel cooperation in the field of Hi-Tech and innovations. First, Israel's position as major world leader in innovation sector and Russia's ambitions to develop innovation-based economy creates a situation in which both countries can be equal partners. Second, Israel holds a substantial number of Russian-speaking scientists, engineers and researchers who had arrived in the country in the 1990s. If Russia and Israel manage to use this natural network efficiently, they would be able to create a technology transfer system. Third, when creating a technology chain between two countries, it is quite useful for production to take place in Russia by using Israeli technologies. For Israel, it will be cheaper and more efficient than to build new factories anywhere else, while in Russia, new employment opportunities will be generated and factories built during the Soviet period will get new life. Fourth, mutual cooperation in the field of innovations will help to broaden the markets for both countries. Israel can be seriously integrated in the Western markets, while, Russia can do the same in the Arab countries where it still has a strong hold. (Maryasis 2015: 52)

There have been numerous examples of Russian-Israeli business and technological ventures and cooperation. Russian launch vehicles were employed on two Israeli satellites in 1998 and 2000. Israel has also become a center for many Russian and Ukrainian crime syndicates which, according to Israeli law-enforcement officials, invested between \$4 billion and \$20 billion in the Israeli economy since the 1970s. (Kreutz 2007: 71) In March 2010, Russia and Israel signed an agreement on cooperation in industrial R&D, within which the federal science and innovation Agency and the Israeli industry centre for R&D interact. (Trofimova, 2015: 462)

Among the large-scale projects, Russian company RUSAL and Israeli company Omen High Pressure Die Casting signed an agreement in March 2014, on the creation of a joint venture (on equal shares) on the basis of the Volkhov Aluminum Smelter. In 2012, an investment agreement was signed by the leading Israeli pharmaceutical company Teva (Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd) for the construction of a pharmaceutical factory in Yaroslavl which is estimated to operate in early 2015. Among the noteworthy projects under implementation by the joint Russian-Israeli Center for agricultural technologies, is

the creation of a large (3600 cows) innovative dairy in the Chechen republic and a dairy and livestock-breeding complex in Tambov oblast. (Trofimova, 2015: 462)

Russia's investments in the Israeli Start-up companies have strengthened the economic relationship between two countries. The government support to the venture capital industry led to the success of Russian venture capital funds such as Almaz, Runet, and DST. There are about 50 classic venture-capital funds in Russia. The majority of new investments were directed to e-commerce. For example, hundreds of millions of dollars invested in Yandex, the main supplier of traffic in e-commerce. There was also significant investment in technology and innovation start-ups, which should ultimately provide good return on investment for venture capital funds. (Chachava 2015) Since the past 15 years, a new trend in Israel's innovation economy is the appearances of a number of technology-focused companies that have just started their activities (start-up companies). These companies basically emerge on the basis of research laboratories in large universities and their product like software, technologies or the procedure of their creation, are being intellectual property rights. Venture investments in these companies are usually made by large companies through institutional investors such as Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Chase Manhattan and others. And the purchase of Israeli start-ups by foreign companies relates to foreign direct investments. (Trofimova, 2015: 462)

The Russian investors have increased competition in the Israeli start-ups companies and venture capital. An important event is the entry of Yandex into the Israeli market, which opened an R&D center, based on the merger of the Kit Locate start-up, and it also invested in the Sales Predict Company together with the Israeli fund Pitango Venture Capital. The total volume of the investments was \$4.1 million. Yandex is going to use Israeli technologies of collecting data and personalizing mobile search to improve its products. A Russian businessman R. Abramovich, through private investment company Millhouse LLC, invested \$10 million into the Israeli start-up company StoreDot, engaged in technologies of quick charging smart phones and in the creation of a new type of electrodes. The international venture fund Flint Capital inked several deals in the Israeli market of start-ups. The investors of the fund Flint Capital are prominent Russian businessmen who work in the sphere of information technologies. The Israeli

partner of the fund is the international investment platform JS Capital, created on the basis of the center of entrepreneurial innovations Jerusalem Start-Up Hub. Flint Capital, founded in May 2013, specializes in financing high-tech projects in the sphere of telecommunication and information technologies and financial and consumer services. Another Russian investment company MenoraInvest purchased 25% of the capital of the Israeli company Silentium, engaged in noise reduction technologies. Another investor in this start-up was an anonymous Russian investment bank, which invested \$10 million. The Russian Mail.ru Group invested \$2 million in the Israeli start-up Magisto, which is the online editor for multimedia content processing. (Trofimova, 2015: 463)

Two Russian venture funds, Maxfield Capital and TMT Investments, also invested money in Israeli start-ups. The Maxfield Foundation, founded in 2013 by A. Turkot, former director of the Skolkovo innovation park, invested more than \$1 million in the start-up SpeakingPal. In 2011, the Russian company TMT Investments purchased 10% share of the Unicell Company, the leading supplier of mobile applications and content in Israel. Among Israel's largest companies with representations in Russia, note ECI Telecom (the production and introduction of telecommunication technologies), Comverse (supplies of software and systems for multimedia communication services), Gilat (the production of solutions for satellite communication), Alvarion (broadband wireless access) and Radware (the production of solutions to optimize operation and protect applications and network resources). The ECI telecom company, created back in 1961, has been working in the Russian market since 1996; about 50% of Russian fiber networks use its equipment. The main partner is Beeline GSM, as well as JSC Rostelecom, which purchases hardware for our networks. The Israeli Alvarion, the leader in WIMAX technologies, has supplied to Russia more than 150 networks for wireless access to the internet, telephony, TV services, and so on. (Trofimova, 2015: 463-464)

Cooperation in Energy Sector

Russia is the world's largest producer of crude oil (including lease condensate) and second largest producer of dry natural gas, after the US. Russia's hydrocarbons are backbone of its economy as revenue generated from oil and natural gas production and exports accounted for more than half of Russia's federal budget revenue. The data

released from Federal Customs Service of Russia shows that Russia exported more than 4.7 million barrels per day of crude oil and lease condensate in 2014. Russia exports more than 98% of its crude oil exports to Asian and European countries. Of them, Asia received 26% of Russia's crude oil exports, while Europe accounted for 72% of Russian crude oil exports- which depends on Russia for more than 30% of the region's oil supply. Russia's economy is largely depends on energy exports: oil and natural gas revenues accounted for 68% of total export value in 2013. (US Energy Information Administration 2015) Russia's economy is highly dependent on its hydrocarbons and its oil and natural gas revenues account for more than 40% of the federal budget revenues. (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2016)⁷ Russia's crude oil reserves amount to 12 billion tones, representing nearly 5 percent of the total world's reserves. During the 20th century, this energy sector plays a vital role for the Soviet military power. And after the World War II, the energy sector becomes a key element for the boost up of the Russian economy. (Verda 2012: 1)

Although the Israeli government avoids revealing the name of its energy exporters, as has been observed 88 percent of Israel's crude oil comes from the Former Soviet Union. Israel worries that oil-rich Persian Gulf states who already boycotted it may act to close off energy routes for the Israel-bound shipments from other countries. Moreover, Israel's dependence on Russian energy is increasing slightly. Following a June 2004 meeting between Alexey Miller, the chairman of Gazprom, and Ariel Sharon, then Israeli Prime Minister, Israel promised to increase the share of imports of Russian gas from one percent to 25 percent by 2025. In November 2005, it was reported that the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline- a \$3.4 billion project between Russia and Turkey- would be extended to Israel through the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. After doing this, Russia and Azerbaijan would be able to export its oil and gas to China through the Red Sea and to southern Europe through the Suez Canal by tanker. Were the Blue Stream Pipeline to be expanded to Eilat, Israel would instantly become a major regional hub of oil and gas, receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in tariff revenues, and more importantly, achieving some much needed energy security. (Bourtman 2006)

⁷ <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS>

Until the finding of natural gas on the Israeli coast in the Mediterranean Sea, Israel was considered to be extremely dependent on energy imports for its domestic needs. Since the discovery of the natural gas, the situation has changed significantly, as the total amount of natural gas found along the Mediterranean coastal shelf, as of autumn 2012, come to 853 billion cubic meters. (Maryasis 2013: 93) According to the EIA report, the eastern Mediterranean region is composed of eight significant basins, including the Cyprus Basin, Eratosthenes Basin, Latakia Basin, Levant Basin, Judea Basin, Nile Delta Basin, Western Arabian Province and Zagros Province. However, the international community has been focusing on the Levant Basin, where Israel and Greek Cyprus have found a major opportunity to develop significant offshore gas resources. (Casin 2015: 51)

After the discoveries of substantial gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the options of exploration of it became a matter of frequent discussion. As Israel moved forward in exploitation of its energy reserves, it would need a strong partner with expertise in both offshore gas deposit exploitation and gas export. (Maryasis 2013: 93-94)

The Russian Federation likes to establish a strong presence in the developing of Eastern Mediterranean gas fields due to several reasons: First, Russia wants to sustain its preeminent position as the number one energy supplier to Europe. Second, Russia wants to counter Turkish initiatives to position itself as a key transit country for Caspian gas. The latter reason compels Russia to support Greek Cyprus's right to develop the gas fields in its EEZ. The Greek Cypriot administration praised Russia for its support and termed Russia as "a shield against any threats by Ankara". Russia's greatest goal is to increase Cypriot and Israeli offshore gas volumes for transport and re-export to the European and international markets through Gazprom. After intense efforts by the Russian government, Gazprom recently finalized a preliminary (non-binding) agreement to obtain liquefied gas from Israel's Leviathan project. These initiatives constitute a component of the strategy to encourage a global move from oil to gas, thereby outflanking Saudi Arabia. (Casin 2015: 58-59)

In 2012, Gazprom bid for a 30% share of Leviathan but later lost it to Australia's Woodside Petroleum. The next year Gazprom signed another deal to market liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Israel's Tamar field, but this deal was also cancelled by Israel's Ministry of Energy, provided the reason to use Tamar gas for Israel's domestic market. (Cohen 2016) Russian President Putin visited Israel in June 2012 with the purpose to seek a deal for the Gazprom, the Russian energy giant, in the development of Israel's gas fields. Putin's visit was the culmination of the long term effort of the Gazprom to enter in the Israeli gas field. The President Putin's move is basically drive political interests rather than economic considerations. Moscow wants to have great influence within the Israeli gas industry, and thus, strategic leverage on issues critical to Israel's national security. (Idan 2013: 103)

Moreover, Russia has entered in the Eastern Mediterranean energy game via Syria. In December 2013, Russia's SoyuzNefteGaz inked a \$90 million deal with Syrian Oil Ministry allowing Russia to invest in Syria-controlled waters in the Eastern Mediterranean for 25 years. In addition, Russia's ties with Syria, Iran, and Lebanon including Hezbollah would allow Russia to increase its naval power in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. But this action may put Russia alongside Lebanon to challenge Israel's maritime borders. Because Lebanon's explorations block number nine falls into contested area between Lebanon and Israel's EEZ. (Lin 2015: 65)

Russia is interested to enter in the LNG market due to falling domestic energy productivity and surging global shale development. Russia is interested to export Mediterranean gas to Asia which consumes 70% of global LNG market. Actually, Russia wants to protect Gazprom monopoly over Europe by preventing Eastern Mediterranean gas supply to European countries. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had reportedly discussed this issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin and assured him to not export gas to Europe if Russia would not supply certain weapons such as S-300 to Syria or Iran. (Lin 2015: 65)

It is also useful for Israel to allow Gazprom a role in Israel's energy industry. Israel believes that Hezbollah could target its infrastructure in the future conflict-something that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah had already threatened. Since Israel's

fifty percent power generation comes via gas from the Tamar field; a single pipeline connects Tamar to Israel possess a huge risk to Israel's energy security. By inviting Russian company, Israel could solve this problem in a stroke. (Cohen 2016) Putin clearly understands this. While lobbying Netanyahu to allow Gazprom to become a partner in Leviathan gas field, Putin promised to prevent extremist groups from attacking any Israeli gas infrastructure. This is an offer Israel should consider. (Cohen 2016)

To be clear, a Russian-Israeli gas partnership is far from perfect and includes a number of pitfalls. First, the US would surely not welcome seeing Gazprom involved in Israel's gas bonanza. Tensions between Washington and Moscow continue to exist, and both the US and EU seek to lessen Gazprom's influence rather than increase it. Therefore, Israel could expect intense pressure from the US not to work with Gazprom. Second, Russia may not be the world's best business partner, since Putin uses Gazprom, long hobbled by corruption, as a weapon against his opponents, denying access to gas supplies as a form of political punishment. The Israeli government would not like to see Gazprom use this type of tactic in Israel. Moreover, Israel would also want to avoid its gas bonanza becoming a prop in any of the Kremlin's geopolitical games. (Cohen 2016)

Military Cooperation

Russia-Israel economic relations strengthened as Russia expressed her desire to buy military equipment from Israel. The Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 revealed a number of shortcomings with the Russian armed forces. Russian armed forces conducted old-fashioned weapons instead of high-tech and non-contact operations in Georgia. On the other hand, Georgian air forces equipped with advanced weapons shot down 4-8 Russian aircraft, which was not destroyed prior to the offensive. However, Russia won the war by using the traditional Russian/Soviet concept of warfare: an overwhelming use of arms and troops. But the Georgian conflict had revealed that the status of the existing arms was worse than assumed until then (Haas 2011: 19-26).

In September 2010 the Russian and Israeli Ministry of Defenses (MoDs) signed a military cooperation agreement with an emphasis on the sale and training of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and setting up a joint drone production unit in Russia. (Haas

2011: 19-26) The said deal was signed by Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and his Israeli counterpart Ehud Barak in Moscow on September 6, 2010. After signing the deal, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said that “Moscow was studying seriously and attentively the experiences and practices of Israel’s military and as it modernizes its army.” Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak had also spoken positively and said “Israel was ready to continue sharing experience with the Russian military on fighting terrorism and ensuring security, including by using air drones.”⁸

In 2010, a military deal between Russia and Israel had been signed in Moscow during the visit of Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak to Russia. This military deal has great significance for several reasons. Russia is a member of ‘Quartet on the West Asia’ along with US, UN and the EU and holds a significant position in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Besides it, Russia is main supplier of weapons to the Israel’s potential enemies in the region such as Iran and Syria and more recent information indicate that Russia is also delivering weapons to Hamas (Metis and Kornet missiles). Israel is mainly concerned by the sale of P-800 anti-ship missiles to Syria and to the Hezbollah militias in Lebanon and the delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft systems to Iran, which may influence the military balance in the Eastern Mediterranean coast region and also undermine the efficiency of an air operation against Iranian nuclear program. (Mihai 2010) By signing military agreement with Russia, Israel can put some pressure on Russia and could prevent it from supplying arms and weapons to its neighboring countries.

Apart from these reasons, Russia and Israel also share some mutual interest that urges both countries to cooperate in the military sector that is the threat of Islamic terrorism. As Russia faces a growing threat of Islamic terrorism on its Southern border that likely to spread to the other parts of the country, the Israel too, accede after decades of fighting Islamic terrorism (Mihai 2010).

The military deal between Russia and Israel that inked on September 6, 2010 has been bind for the next five years. The deal included the exchange of information and expertise on international security, military education, medicine, military training and

⁸ <http://www.rferl.org/a/Russia-Israel-Sign-Military-Cooperation-Agreement/2150123.html>

fight against terrorism etc. The focus point of this military deal was the delivery of twelve UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) to Russia, which is made in Israel, as 50 Russian technicians have already been trained in operating them. Besides the delivery of 12 UAVs, Russia and Israel is also being discussed to build a centre to produce such advanced equipment in Russia. (Mihai 2010) Russian officials said that Israel had already sold twelve UAVs to Moscow and would supply 36 more, worth around \$100 million. Israeli Defense minister Ehud Barak also met the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin during his visit to the Moscow, the latter said, “We have purchased several unmanned aerial vehicles in Israel. We have launched a few satellites in Israel’s interests. We are examining the possibility of equipping Israeli airplanes with our instruments and laser equipment.” (Russia, Israel sign military cooperation agreement 2010)

In conclusion, we can say that Russia and Israel are on the way to develop full-fledged relationship since the reestablishment of diplomatic relationship between the two countries in October 1991. Both countries are trying to overcome from the strained relationship of the cold war period. Although Russia and Israel are developing relationship and cooperating in every field including trade, hi-tech and innovation sector, energy sector and military cooperation, they are still far to become a good partner in the international system. Both countries have still not fully utilized the potential of their cooperation. However, Russia-Israel relationship cannot be fully understood until the study of Russia’s policy towards Arab-Israel conflicts. Without knowing the nature of Russia’s policy towards West Asia conflicts, it is nearly impossible to understand the nature of Russia-Israel relationships.

Chapter III

Russia's Policy towards Arab-Israel Peace Process

The Arab-Israeli conflicts are not a new phenomenon in the world history; it has historical roots. The conflict first appeared at the end of the 19th century as a response to the emergence of Zionism in Eastern Europe. Zionism is the Jewish national movement to foster the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This Zionist movement was opposed by Palestinians and other Arabs, Christian and Muslims, not because of Jewish immigration per se, but because Jewish statehood would automatically deny political rights to Palestinian Arabs, as was made clear in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. (Smith 2013: 1)

Before the publication of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917, there was no 'Palestine problem'. There was just Palestine itself, with its overwhelmingly Palestinian population. (Adams 1988: 72) Within a month of issuing the Balfour Declaration, the British had driven the Turkish forces from Jerusalem. Following this victory, it became possible for Zionists to work with the British in establishing a Jewish national home as promised by the Balfour Declaration. In order to ensure that a Jewish National home would be established in Palestine, a Jewish delegation headed by Chaim Weizmann addressed the Paris Peace Conference on 27 February 1919. After listening to impassioned speeches by the delegates, including Menachem Ussishkin, the Paris Peace Conference agreed to grant the Palestine Mandate to Great Britain, and accepted the need to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine as outlined in the Balfour Declaration. Subsequently the territory was transferred to Britain, yet Arabs continued to attack the Jewish population. (Sherbok et. al. 2006: 21-22)

Soviet policy towards Arab-Israel conflicts during the Cold War Period

Russia, the then Soviet Union, was a superpower till its disintegration in December 1991. The West Asia region was a focal point of confrontation between the two superpowers- the US and the Soviet Union. Soviet Union played a major role in the

West Asia region especially in the Arab-Israel conflict. This chapter is divided mainly in two parts- the Soviet Union's policy towards Arab-Israel conflict in the Cold War period, and Russia's policy towards Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the Post-Cold War period.

The Soviet Union played a significant role in the Arab- Israel conflict as the conflict was the focal point in the global rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union during the cold war era. After the World War II, Stalin adopted a pro-Zionist foreign policy, without changing of his official anti- Zionist stance. Stalin declared that "he was a 'Zionist', however, was an entirely different thing. The admission, even though qualified, by the Russian communist leader seems to have had something to do with his postwar plans, since, up to that time, Zionism had been taboo for the communists." (Weinryb 1979-80: 556) Stalin adopted pro-Zionist stance with the hope that the new Jewish state would be the socialist country and would help to demise the western influence in the region. Accordingly, in November 1947, the Soviet Union, together with the other Soviet bloc countries voted in favor of the United Nations partition plan for Palestine, which paved the way for the creation of the State of Israel. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared its independence. Within an hour, the US president Truman recognized de facto to the new Jewish state, the State of Israel. However, the Soviet Union became the first country who grants Israel de jure recognition. (Brown 1948: 620)

The Soviet Union was based on Marxist- Leninist ideology and its policies towards third world countries were guided by this ideology. Soviet Union kept its policy of supporting communist movement across the world. (Kramer 1999: 539)

Stalin's policy towards First Arab- Israeli war, 1948-49:

The first Arab-Israeli war, fought in 1948-49, known by Israelis as the War of Independence and by the Palestinians as *al-Nakba* (the Catastrophe). (Bickerton 2009: 66) In this war, the Soviet Union took the side of the State of Israel when it was attacked by the then Western-oriented Arab countries (mainly Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan) that opposed the 1947 United Nations resolution for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. By the end of 1948, the Israeli army properly equipped with

arms provided by Soviet Union, through Czechoslovakia defeated combined Arab forces. (Pressman 2005: 6) On January 12, 1949, the United Nations interfered in the matter and asked conflicting parties to come on the negotiating table. The UN arranged armistice talks between the parties in Rhodes. Consequently, the State of Israel signed ceasefire agreements with Egypt (February 14), Lebanon (March 23), Transjordan (April 3) and Syria (July 20). Iraq refused to sign the armistice agreement with Israel. However, the all five Arab countries remained in a state of war with Israel. Under this settlement, the State of Israel expanded its territories to encompass nearly 80 percent of Palestine. (Rowley et. al. 2006: 79)

Many historians believe that Soviet support to the State of Israel in its War of Independence was directed to diminish the British influence in the West Asia region. However, within several years, the Soviet support to the State of Israel had been ended. The shifting of Soviet policy has been attributed to a variety of factors. First, Israel tilted towards the West and supported the UN resolutions against North Korea. It also received the extensive assistance from the Western countries. Second, the Soviet anti-Semitic policy had been reversed and the cultural purges of Soviet Jews were on the peak in 1947-1948. Third, the Soviet Union feared that the ties with Israel could lead to a spread of Zionists settlement among Soviet Jews. In this regard, the Stalin administration had already warned Israeli diplomat for developing contacts with the Soviet Jews. Fourth, the emigration of Soviet Jews was almost banned. From May 1948 to the end of 1951, only five Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate for the newly Jewish State. Finally, the Soviet leader Stalin's own growing anti-Semitic attitudes led to the situation more badly. (Slater 1990-1991: 562-563; Klinghoffer 1990: 94)

By the early 1950s, it had been cleared that the Soviet policy was shifting towards the Arab countries. In mainstream interpretations, the Soviet Union started to support the Arab countries after 1955 that introduced the Cold War into the Arab-Israeli conflict and created a potential superpower confrontation. As the Arab-Israeli conflicts heated up, the Soviet Union became the main patron of the radical Arab countries. (Slater 1990-1991: 563; Klinghoffer 1990: 94)

Khrushchev's policy of "Peaceful Coexistence" and the 1956 Suez Crises

The concept of 'Peaceful Coexistence' was introduced by Nikita Khrushchev, then General Secretary of the CPSU, at the 20th congress of CPSU held in Moscow on February 14-25, 1956. It has been argued that the 'peaceful coexistence' is not simply a description of contemporary international relations; rather it is a principle or set of principles of international relations. The concept was introduced to reduce hostility between two superpowers or between two ideologies- communism and capitalism. The committee on Peaceful Coexistence of the Soviet Association of International Law declared in 1962, "The principle of peaceful coexistence is a universally recognized principle of modern international law;whereas international law of the past was a law of war and peace, it has today become a law of peace and peaceful coexistence." (Lipson 1964: 871)

The Arab-Israeli war of 1956 was the result of aggressive approach of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's towards Israel and the West. Since 1948, the Egypt had remained in a war with Israel and it had always refused Israeli ships access to the Suez Canal which passes through Egyptian territory, in spite of, Egyptian actions had been condemned by the UNSC in September 1951. In early 1956, the Egypt denied Israeli ships access to the Gulf of Aqaba by blocking the straits of Tiran, which ultimately cut off Israel's access to petroleum, which was Israel's only outlet to the red sea. And in July 1956, Egyptian president Nasser seized the Suez Canal from Great Britain and nationalized it, ultimately provoked Great Britain. The Suez Canal was owned by an Anglo-French company at that time. On October 29, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike, with the support of Great Britain and France, and dropped Israeli paratroops to seize the Mitla Pass in Sinai (Rowley and Taylor 2006: 80).

The Soviet Union kept itself away from the Suez crisis of 1956 and on the other hand, the US was also not involved in the war. Both superpowers- the US and the Soviet Union criticized the joint attack by Great Britain, France and Israel on Egypt. And the US pressured on Britain, France and Israel to end the attack and withdraw their military forces from Egyptian territory. Despite the poor military performance of his forces, Egyptian president Nasser declared a symbolic victory (Pressman 2005: 5-6). However,

the arms deal between Egypt and Czechoslovakia in September 1955 angered the US and Western world and led them to criticize Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence". With the signature of the Egyptian- Czech arms agreement, the Soviet bloc began to supply large quantities of modern weapons to the Arab nations. (Golani 1995)

Brezhnev's policy towards the Six-Day War of 1967:

The six-day war of 1967 between Israel and Arab countries happened due to the false report by Soviet Union. On May 13, 1967, the Egyptian president Nasser received a report by a Soviet intelligence which claimed that Israel was deploying massive troops on the Israeli- Syrian borders as it poised to attack. On the base of Soviet intelligence report, Egypt then took three escalatory steps, ultimately pushed the situation into war. First, Egypt deployed its forces in the Sinai Peninsula near Israeli border on May 13-14, 1967. Second, Egypt asked the UN peacekeepers to leave the Sinai Peninsula in between May 16-21, 1967 where they had been since late 1956. Third, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran for Israeli shipping on May 23, 1967. (Pressman 2005: 6) Moreover, the US President Johnson refused to act on the pledge which the US administration had given to Israel in February 1957 that "no nation has the right to prevent free and innocent passage in the Straits of Tiran". (Shindler 2008: 123)

Israel took the offensive step and launched Operation Moked in the morning of June 5, 1967 which devastated the unprotected Egyptian air force on their airfields. Over 300 Egyptian aircrafts were destroyed, followed by the destructive attacks on the Jordanian and Syrian air forces. (Shindler 2008: 124-25) On June 9, Israeli forces were ordered to undertake a massive assault to conquer the Syria's Golan Heights. After six days of fighting, the war ended on June 10 with lots of casualties on both sides. But Arab countries suffer more than Israel. On the Israeli side, approximately 780 were dead and 2500 wounded; on the other hand, Egypt lost approximately 10,000-15,000 dead and 5000 were taken prisoner by Israeli forces; Jordan lost perhaps 800 killed and over 600 as prisoner to Israel; Syria lost approximately 500 dead, 2500 wounded, and almost 600 were captured as prisoner. (Caplan 2010: 146)

The Six-day war of 1967 became the turning point in the history of Arab-Israeli conflicts. This war has changed the geopolitical balance and map of the West Asia. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conquered the huge territory of Arab countries including Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and the Golan Heights which added 430,000 sq. km. to Israel's territory- an area equal to three and a half times larger than Israel's existing territory. Further, Israel's conquest region of Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, Jordanian West Bank, and Syrian Golan heights created bilateral bargaining situations between Israel and the Arab countries, giving rise to the formula of exchanging "land for peace". This formula was soon elevated into a sacred principle as the required starting point for seeking ways to end the Arab-Israeli conflicts. (Caplan 2010: 146-148)

The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 also turned to be breaking point in the relationship between Israel and Soviet Union. Soviet Union severed its diplomatic relations with the State of Israel as it rejected the Soviet proposal of ceasefire. (Karsh 1985: 216)



Source: <http://www.passia.org/palestine facts/MAPS/Greater Israel after 1967.htm>

The War of Attrition

The term “war of attrition” has been applied to Israeli-Egyptian clashes started from March 1969 to the restoration of ceasefire in August 1970. This war, if it had been successful, would have caused a major upheaval in the region. The Egyptian wanted to cross the Suez Canal and reoccupy the Sinai Peninsula, while the Israelis not only tried to prevent the Egyptian and reestablish the ceasefire, but it seriously attempted to undermine the Egyptian government through military pressure. (Khalidi 1973: 60) The Egyptian started a fresh round of artillery duel with Israeli forces across the Suez Canal followed by the failed attempt to renew diplomatic interest at the United Nations in September 1968. Israel reacted by raiding deeper into Egypt and by accelerating the construction of fortification along its side of the canal, the Bar Lev line. The Egyptians, in response, undertook more extended war of attrition in March 1969, intended to weaken the Israeli forces through intensive artillery barrages. These duels across the Suez Canal were accompanied by Egyptian and Israeli demands for the latest weapons technology from their respective sponsors, Soviet Union and the US. (Smith 2013: 311)

Soviet Union provided surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and additional Soviet fighter aircraft (with Soviet pilots to fly them) to Egypt. In this war, there was a direct Soviet-Israeli air battle on July 30, 1970; resulting in five Soviet aircraft downed with no Israeli losses. The “War of Attrition” ended in August 1970 shortly after Egypt and Israel agreed to cease-fire. The war cost Israel over 700 dead and 2700 wounded, while the Arab losses were three to five times more. (Buckwalter: 119)

The Arab- Israeli War, 1973 or Yom Kippur war:

The October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, known as the Yom Kippur War in Israel and the Ramadan War in Arab countries was a watershed event in Arab- Israeli relations. The war is perhaps the most examined example of strategic surprise in history. The war began when the coalition forces of the Arab states led by Egypt and Syria launched a joint surprise attack on Israel on the day of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism. That year the Yom Kippur happened to occur during the month of Ramadan, the holy month for Muslims. Egyptian and Syrian forces crossed ceasefire lines to enter the Israeli-held Sinai

Peninsula and Golan Heights respectively, which had been captured and occupied since the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Both the US and the Soviet Union supplied massive arms and weapons to their respective allies during the war, and this led to a near-confrontation between the two nuclear superpowers (Buckwalter: 126-127).

Although the Arab armies did well in the first day of the 1973 war, the war took a sudden “U” turn in the Israeli favor on October 15, 1973. And by October 24, the Egyptian third army was surrounded by the Israeli forces. The Soviet leadership did not expect for huge defeat of their Arab client, and as a response, Brezhnev informed the US President Richard Nixon that “if the US did not agree to a joint expeditionary force to stop Israeli violations of the ceasefire, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally”. In response, the US put all its defense forces, including those in charge of strategic nuclear weapons, on a “Defense Condition Three” alert, while at the same time, it also put pressure on the Israel to lift the siege, which Israel ultimately did. (Dawisha 1991: 125)

The Soviet Union and the Oil Crisis of 1973:

Following the defeat in the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the oil exporting Arab countries imposed an oil embargo on West European countries and Japan. These included cut in oil production and banning of oil exports to industrialized economies such as West Europe and Japan, who were the US allies. At the same time, the OPEC members, Arab and non-Arab, used this occasion to quadruple the price of their oil. These situations created panic among West European countries and Japan because they were highly dependent upon West Asian oil for their energy needs. Following the oil crisis, the West European states isolate themselves from the US policy towards Arab-Israeli conflict. (Campbell 1977)

The oil crisis of 1973 provided an opportunity to the Soviet Union to leverage its economy. At the time of outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Soviet Union was the third largest producer of oil in the world after the US and Saudi Arabia. The oil embargo imposed by Arab countries generated a favorable situation of significant economic gains for the Soviet Union. Notably, the Arab countries imposed an oil embargo on West

European states, who were US allies, not on the communist countries, who had been overt supporters of Arab sides (Goldman 1975: 137-138). The communist countries were exempted from the oil embargo as they promised not to re-export any Arab oil to the embargoed countries. The Soviet Union managed to gain benefit of the situation and it increases the purchase of oil from Arab countries in 1973, especially from Iraq, who had refused to cut its oil production and restrict its sales. In 1973, Iraq sold a record of 80 million barrels oil to the Soviet Union, more than the total imports of oil from the Arab countries combined in any previous year (Goldman 1975: 137-138).

Goldman (1975) argued that it is not clear whether the Soviet Union was persisting on her commitments to not sale oil to embargoed countries. The official position of the Soviet Union was ‘the oil purchased from Arab states would only be sent to other socialist countries’. But the reality was different from the official position. The Soviet Union took the advantage of the oil scarcity situation in the Western world by increasing its oil exports by 81 million barrels in 1973 compared to previous year. Undoubtedly, the 40 million barrels increase in imports from the Arab countries in 1973 made possible to additional exports to the West. The Soviet Union earned \$700 more in 1973 than in 1972 from exports of oil. The oil embargo also resulted in the increase of petroleum prices. Nearly three-fold increase in petroleum prices was a sign of some petroleum must be sold to the Netherlands whose Arab countries strictly embargoed. In December 1973, when a Swedish correspondent reported that the Soviet Union was selling oil to Netherlands, he was expelled by the Soviet government. In 1973, Soviet Union also sold some petroleum to the US. (Goldman 1975: 137-138)

Camp David Accord and Soviet Union’s Absence

After long bitter consequences, the conflicting parties realized the seriousness of the war and turned to the peace agreements. On September 17, 1978, the Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed agreements at Camp David after thirteen days of secret negotiations from September 5 to September 17, 1978. The agreements were witnessed by the US President Jimmy Carter. The Camp David Accord was not merely the foundation of a separate, bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, but it was a genuine framework for a

comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Palestine problem. The Camp David Accord comprises two framework agreements: “Framework for Peace in the Middle East” and “Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel”. The first agreement reached by the US, Israel and Egypt incorporated several provisions including the set up of a “self-governing” authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to replace the Israeli military government in those areas. The modalities for establishing that authority, as well as its powers and responsibilities, will be determined by Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The “self-governing” authority will exercise the powers for a five-year period of transition. It was also provided that the representatives of the “self-governing” authority, along with Israel, Egypt and Jordan, would participate in those negotiations based on UNSC Resolution 242. This would enable the Palestinians to have a clear voice in determining their own future. The final status of the West Bank and Gaza would be decided by votes of elected representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. The second framework of the agreements outlined a Peace Treaty not only between Egypt and Israel but also between Israel and each of its other Arab neighbors who is prepared to negotiate peace. (Sayegh 1979: 3-4; Tabory 1983: 982; Vance et. al. 1979: 327; Alam 1992: 79)

The Camp David accords were a significant turning point in the recent history of the West Asia. Praised by some for laying the foundations for peace between Egypt and Israel, but on the other hand, the accords have also been criticized for failing to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian dispute. But supporters and critics alike recognize the importance of the Camp David accords and both acknowledge the vital role played by the US in reaching an agreement. (Quandt 1986: 57)

The second framework of the Camp David accord outlined the basis for the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. On the basis of aforementioned framework, the Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in Washington on March 26, 1979 under the auspices of US President Jimmy Carter. By signing of the peace treaty, both parties agreed to recognize and respect each other’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. They agreed to refrain from using of force, directly or indirectly, against each other and will settle all disputes through peaceful means. The State of Israel agreed

to withdraw its forces from the Sinai Peninsula which Israel had conquered during the Six-day of 1967, in return for normal and friendly relations with Egypt. The agreement also included the provision of free passage of Israeli ships and cargoes through the Suez Canal and its approaches through the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean Sea on the basis of the Constantinople Convention of 1888, applying to all nations. (Vance et. al. 1979: 327; Tabory 1983: 981) The Soviet Union was not part of this treaty, as it was not in Camp David accord. This was a major defeat for a country like Soviet Union who had invested lots of money and power for the economic and military development of the Egypt.

The Lebanon War, 1982

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which is also known as First Lebanon War, is perhaps the most complicated and controversial war in the history of Arab-Israel conflict. The immediate background was instability in South Lebanon bordered with Israel, from where Palestinians had been launching rockets against Israeli towns, especially Kiryat Shmonah. (Fraser 2004:124) Lebanon was drawn into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the presence of large number of Palestinian refugees in its territory. Following the PLO⁹ expulsion from Jordan in 1970, the Palestinian militias, numbering approximately 15,000, settled in the southern Lebanon and created a “state within the state”. The border areas of southern Lebanon became a launching site for Palestinian rockets and Guerrilla attacks against Israel. (Bickerton 2009: 148-149) In response to PLO’s long-range rocket attacks over northern Israel, the Israeli air force continued its strikes on Palestinian refugee camps. In the early 1980s, an estimated number of 6000 PLO fighters were located in the southern Lebanon, with another 9000 in Beirut and north. These PLO fighters were equipped with jeeps, mortars and artillery pieces, including long-range Soviet and French guns, Soviet Katyusha and North Korean

⁹ The Palestine Liberation Organization was created in January 1964 at the Arab League Summit in Cairo. The Palestine National Council, the PLO’s parliament, convened its first sitting in Jerusalem in May 1964 and adopted a National Charter calling for the elimination of Israel and the restoration of Palestine to the Palestinians. (Caplan 2010: 144)

rockets and shoulder-launched missiles, and around 80 Soviet tanks. (Bickerton 2009: 151)

Finally, the US took initiative to mediate an UN-sponsored peace agreement. On August 18, 1982, the Israel, Lebanon and PLO agreed to sign a peace agreement. Consequently, on August 21, 1982, 350 French paratroopers, 800 US marines and additional French and Italian peacekeepers (for a total force of 2,130) deployed in Beirut to supervise the removal of about 6,500 Fatah fighters from the capital by sea and then overland to Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, North and South Yemen, Greece and Tunisia. (Bickerton 2009: 153) Both leaders- Israeli PM Begin and PLO leader Arafat expressed their faith in multinational force to supervise an agreement. (Fraser 2004: 126).

The superpowers played a limited role in the events that led to the Lebanon war. While the US role was some critical but the Soviet role was negligible. Neither Soviet Union nor the US was particularly interested in Lebanon but they became involved in response to promptings by their local allies. Israel accused Soviet Union for aiding and abetting the PLO. But Soviet policy was confused and contradictory. It is true that the Soviet Union enabled the PLO in stockpiling of large quantities of weapons in south Lebanon but at the same time it urged the PLO to suspend the military action and come for a political solution of the conflict (Shlaim 1996).

First Intifada, 1987-1993

The first Intifada, popularly known as Intifada was a Palestinian uprising against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory. It included the violent behavior and initiated by the young Palestinians, who started throws stones and iron bars on Israeli soldiers who responded with rubber bullets, tear gas and tanks. The movement lasted six years with a series of violent attacks from both sides. (Bickerton 2009: 158)

In February 1988, a new militant fundamentalist group, the Islamic resistance movement (Hamas) joined the intifada. Hamas was set up by the Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas's goal was to establish an Islamic state in Palestine, based on Sharia. During the six years of intifada period, thousands of

Palestinians and many Israelis lost their lives. But the intifada movement was unable to achieve its goal of an independent Palestinian state. (Bickerton 2009: 158-159)

Palestinian declaration of independence

In consideration of the Jordanian monarch's announcement, PLO leader Yasser Arafat took the diplomatic initiative. After meeting with King Hussein and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Arafat proclaimed the independent state of Palestine by a vote of 253 to 46 at a meeting in Algiers on November 15, 1988. The proclamation was also read in front of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The declaration of independence, although it mirrored the Israeli declaration of independence in its arguments, did not explicitly recognize Israel. However, it explicitly accept the UN General Assembly (partition) resolution 181 of 1947 described it as providing international legitimacy that ensure the right of Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty. The acceptance of UN resolution provided base for the forthcoming peace process with Israel. (Bickerton 2009: 161-162)

Madrid Conference, 1991 and Soviet Union's role:

The Madrid Peace Conference was historic in that sense the participants involved in the official peace conference, for the first time, engaged in direct negotiations. The Conference's opening session was addressed by both- the US President George W. Bush and the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev on October 30, 1991 in Madrid, Spain. The US President Bush told the participants that the aim of the conference "is not simply to end the state of war in the West Asia and replace it with a state of nonbelligerency. Rather the goal of the conference is the real peace that includes treaties, security, diplomatic relations, economic relations, trade, investment, cultural relations and even tourism." The US President Bush, however, cautioned that "We come here to Madrid as realists. We don't expect peace to be negotiated in a day or a weak or a month or even a year". (Pfeiffer 1991: 21)

The peace conference was divided into a series of panels so that Israeli teams could negotiate with their Arab counterparts from Lebanon, Syria and a joint Jordanian-

Palestinian delegation¹⁰ separately. The talks were based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, as well as the Camp David Accords of 1978. The UN resolutions declared the principles of 'Land for Peace' and the need for direct negotiations. The operative Camp David points involved the idea of interim stages for ironing out differences prior to final negotiations, especially regarding to the occupied territories and the fate of Palestinians. (Smith 2013: 421) Beyond bilateral negotiations, the multilateral talks on arms control and other regional issues were also scheduled to begin soon after the opening session. But the Arab countries showed less interest in the bilateral and multilateral talks, intended mainly to settle the venue question. While Israel wanted to hold the follow-on talks in West Asia, the Arab participants wanted them to remain in Madrid or at another neutral site in Western Europe. The Syrian and Lebanese delegates initially failed to appear in the follow-on talks at the scheduled bilateral meeting with the Israelis. But after the intense pressure from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the US, both Arabian countries attended the late night sessions. The Israeli-Syrian meeting was the first meeting in this series and it was also the first time, Israel hold peace talks with Syrian delegates after the eruption of Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The Madrid conference also marked the first time Israeli government officially met with Palestinians who openly embrace the goal of Palestinian statehood. (Pfeiffer 1991: 21)

For more than a year thereafter, delegations continued to meet bilaterally under the US State Department auspices in Washington, while a number of multilateral committees convened in different venues around the world to discuss topics of regional concern, including water resources, economic development, arms control, environmental issues, and refugees. Only slight progress could be reported from the many rounds of bilateral Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Jordanian (which quietly gave birth to separate Israeli-Palestinian) talks in Washington. (Caplan 2010: 202) The talks between Israel and Jordan continued for almost two years following the Madrid Peace Conference, culminating in the signing of a peace treaty on October 26, 1994. (Ryan 1998: 161)

¹⁰ The Jordanians provided the umbrella for Palestinians participation due to Israeli insistence on not meeting with any PLO representatives.

Although the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991 and its superpower status gone, the Russian federation under president Yeltsin hosted the first round of multilateral peace talks in January 1991, which was set out in Madrid conference. Throughout eleven round of unproductive bilateral talks between Israel and Arab, begun in Madrid, Russia remain committed to the peace process. Although the Israeli decision to expatriate 415 Palestinians who were supporters of Islamic Resistance Front (HAMAS) provoked anger among Russians and criticism by media, it did not deter Russia's determination to encourage Arab participation. The Israeli bombing on Lebanon in July 1993 would also not change Russia's position and it remains support for talks. However, the President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev faced domestic criticism for failure to bolster Arab bargaining on the negotiating table (Herrmann 1994: 464).

Russia's Policy towards Arab-Israel Peace Process

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, the Successor state of the Soviet Union, started to play a significant role in the West Asia Peace process. The Russian Federation took the seat of co-sponsorship along with the US in the Arab-Israel peace process.

Oslo Peace Agreement, 1993:

The Oslo peace accord, also known as Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed between the State of Israel and the PLO, the representative of Palestinians, on September 13, 1993 in Washington DC. The agreement took place after a series of secret negotiations between the two parties conducted secretly in Oslo, Norway. (Azad 2000:69) The Oslo Peace agreement, 1993 was produced independently of the Madrid Peace talks and without the US involvement. The accord was the result of intense efforts made by Yossi Beilin, the then deputy foreign minister in the Rabin administration. He pursued PLO representative, Ahmad Quarai, who happened to be PLO treasurer, for peace talks. The negotiations between two parties (non-governmental negotiators) lasted from December 1992 to August 1993, nearly all conducted in locales in and around Oslo. Although the Clinton administration was aware of the meetings, it was not aware about the content or progress. The Oslo Peace Accord was initialed in Oslo on August 20, 1993,

but the official signing took place on September 13, 1993 at the White House, Washington DC. (Smith 2013: 438-439)

The Oslo peace accords made a major breakthrough in the history of Arab- Israel conflict. It was possible due to the Israel's acceptance to PLO as a negotiating partner on behalf of the Palestinians and on the other side PLO's willingness to accept a step-by-step process with no guarantee of when it would end (Haass 1996: 54). By signing of this agreement, both parties agreed to recognize each other. The PLO recognized Israel's right to existence, accepted United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and 338, and renounced terrorism, on the other hand, Israel recognized the PLO as its negotiating partner on behalf of Palestinians. The Declaration of Principles (DOP) provided for Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority (PISGA- the future Palestinian Authority or PA) composed of an elected council that would govern the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the interim period of five years preceded by the withdrawal of Israeli defense forces (IDF) from that region. During the interim period of five years, the parties would also negotiate on the other core issues like- the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and border issues. However, the negative point of this agreement was that it did not recognize Palestinian self-determination or call for a Palestine state. The remarkable point of this agreement was that it was the first direct, face to face agreement between the Israeli government and PLO. (Pressman 2005: 10-11; Smith 2013: 439-440)

The agreement was signed in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton and it was duly signed by Mahmoud Abbas on behalf of PLO and Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres for the Israel. The agreement was witnessed by the US President Bill Clinton, US secretary of state Warren Christopher, Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. (Rooney 1993)¹¹ Although the Russia federation was part of the Oslo peace accords as a witness with the US and it was duly signed by Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev, but it had taken back seat

¹¹ http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1644149_1644147_1644129,00.html

behind the US. Russia allowed US to play key role in the negotiating process. When Kozyrev was foreign minister from 1991 to January 1996, Russia followed pro-western path in the world affairs and it generally played a little role in the West Asia peace process. Russian president Yeltsin characterized this period as a time of “extreme timidity towards the West, whilst allowing relations with the third world to weaken”. (Kreutz 2007: 54) However, Posuvalyuk later claimed that “Russian diplomats not only knew about the secret meeting in Oslo, but also actively promoted its successful outcome”. (Kreutz 2007: 55) An Israeli reporter summed up the feeling in his country about Russia when he wrote that “Moscow was not an active participant in the process, nor is it briefed on developments on a regular basis. The Russians are merely invited to the White House to sign documents already agreed upon, perhaps out of nostalgia for the Madrid conference where Russia was co-sponsor”. (Nizameddin 1999: 120)

But Russia’s position cannot be underestimated by these facts. Despite of its pro-western policy, it did not deter from its position to encourage Arab countries for the peace negotiating process. After 1993, Palestinians received more sympathy when pro-western liberals began to disappear from the Russian political stage. Following the summit meeting, Yeltsin’s office issued a statement underlining his government’s broader interests by stating that “establishing a lasting and fair peace was and remains a strategic priority for Russia in this region of vital importance”. (Nizameddin 1999: 150)

Gaza-Jericho Agreement, 1994

With the active participation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, US secretary of State Christopher, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev and other dignitaries, the Israeli PM Rabin and PLO Chairman Arafat signed an agreement famously known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement on May 4, 1994 in Cairo, also known as Cairo agreement. The agreement took place after a several round of meetings between PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. The agreement was the follow-up treaty of Oslo Peace Accords in which the details were concluded about the Palestinian autonomy. The Gaza-Jericho agreement provided for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho as presumed in the original text of the Oslo I agreement. The key points of the agreement were the assumption of authority over most civilian affairs in Gaza and

Jericho by a 24-member Palestinian Authority chaired by Arafat. Its authority will cover 62 sq. kms in Jericho and some 350 sq. kms of Gaza, except for Israeli settlements and IDF installations. The withdrawal of Israeli troops from these areas, which will happen no later than May 25, 1994, would be replaced by the 9000 Palestinian police force. The agreement also contained the provision of appointment of a Palestinian National Authority (PNA) which would take over from the Israeli military administration for managing Palestinian affairs with the exception security and foreign affairs. The agreement also contained a provision of regarding election in Gaza and West Bank for electing democratically a Palestinian legislative council by July 1995. As per the agreement, Israel handed over control of the daily administration of Gaza and Jericho to the Palestinians, ended forty-seven years of Israeli occupation on May 13, 1994. For the first, Palestinians got an opportunity to express themselves as an independent political authority- a fact not only recognized by the Israel but by the international community as well. (Azad 2000: 80-81; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994)

Russian President Yeltsin found it hard to ignore continuous criticism by political opponents regarding Russia's stance on the Palestinian issue. Therefore it was not surprising when President Yeltsin invited PLO chairman Yasser Arafat to Moscow and met him on April 19, 1994, after the signing of historical Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and PLO in September 1993. President Yeltsin assured PLO that his government would help create a Palestinian police force for the newly established Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Another factor which motivated Russia to support for Arafat since the Oslo peace accord of 1993 was the perception that the PLO leader Arafat represents the moderate forces. Arafat presented himself as democratic, secular and progressive leader of the Palestine and he made genuine efforts to fight Palestinian terrorist groups- a point which he confirmed at the White House agreement signed in October 1998 with Netanyahu. The only other alternative to Arafat was the violent and authoritarian Hamas, which had grown out of the miserable conditions of the Gaza refugee camps. And it would have been difficult for Russian leadership to support Hamas instead of the PLO. In May 1994 Kozyrev clarified Russia's position and offered strong language in support of Arafat. In the light of violent opposition to the peace process, Kozyrev expressed that "We received him [Arafat] in Moscow, on his visit on the eve of

the signing of Gaza-Jericho Agreement, was not simply a gesture of protocol, but was in fact an expression of support him as the top leader”. (Nizameddin 1999: 150-151)

Oslo II Agreement of 1995:

The Oslo II Accord officially known as ‘Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip’ was initialed by Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Yasser Arafat on September 24, 1995. Four days later, the official signing of the agreement took place at the White House, Washington, on September 28, 1995 (Smith 2013: 449). The Oslo II agreement was that “Interim Agreement” first mentioned in the Oslo Peace Accord, 1993 but never negotiated. The conclusion of the Oslo I agreement had been a necessary precondition to the election of the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority (PISGA). The Oslo II agreement specified that the election of the PISGA or ‘council’ would take place no later than January 1996, eighteen months after its original deadline. The ‘five-year transitional’ or ‘interim period’ would be counted from May 4, 1994, the date of Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho. And permanent status negotiations would commence on May 4, 1996, with the deadline for a final agreement of May 4, 1999. (Smith 2013: 449)

This agreement set out provisions for the promised Palestinian council elections and divided the West Bank land into three areas- A, B and C. Area A placed under exclusive Palestinian civil and security control, which consists of Palestinian towns and urban areas. Area B was jointly-controlled territory, where Palestine would be responsible for civil authority and Israel would be for overall security, consisted of Palestinian villages and less populated areas. Area C was exclusively under Israeli civil and security control, consisted of land confiscated by Israel for settlement and roads. Areas A and B respectively represented 7.6% and 21.4% of the West bank and Gaza and covered more than 90% local Palestinian population. Area C covered 71% of the Palestinian territories. In other word, Israel only relinquished approximately 30% of the West Bank to the full or partial control of the Palestinian authority and around 65% of the Gaza Strip. Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin saw Oslo II agreement as a cautious step in the right direction of accommodating Palestinian aspirations, but for PLO Chairman Yasser

Arafat, it fell short of creating the necessary conditions for Palestinian statehood. (Bickerton 2009: 173-174)

Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev's extensive visit to the West Asia at the end of March 1995 gave clear indication that Moscow was willing to play active role in the Arab-Israeli peace process and it would not allow Washington to take efforts unilaterally. Before his departure to the West Asia, Kozyrev acknowledged that "the West Asia peace process is facing great difficulties". While Foreign Minister Kozyrev stressed that Russia's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian disputes guided by more closely cooperation with the US, he also mentioned that "it is evident now that the efforts by one co-sponsor are not enough to add dynamism to the processes". In the spring of 1995, Russia showed her strength on the Israeli-Palestinian track when Kozyrev's most senior aide responsible for the West Asia, Viktor Posuvaliuk attempted to meet with Faisal Husseini, a senior PLO official, in east Jerusalem. The State of Israel strongly opposed Russia's move because 'status of Jerusalem' was, even today, highly sensitive for Israel. However, Russian official went ahead with the planned meeting despite Kozyrev's assurances to Israeli officials that his deputy would not do so. (Nizameddin 1999: 152-153)

In the Oslo II agreement of 1995, Russia's active participation as a witness of the agreement showed one step backward to her pro-western policy. Russia welcomed the Arab-Israeli negotiations. A senior Russian official defended Russia's role and argued that it had actually become increasingly prominent since 1991. While he did not deny that US diplomacy was more active at some phases of the negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, he added that neither power had the full capability of finding a lasting peace between the two parties. He subsequently noted that "the Oslo agreement was a fruit of direct talks between the PLO and Israeli government, concealed from both the US and Russia". According to interviewer Kepechenko, with consideration to the view from Moscow that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was no longer a foremost priority, Russia did not have to be present at every step of events but rather make it available when its help was needed. (Nizameddin 1999: 155)

The Russian government, after the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister, showed indication that he is willing to play an important role in the West Asia particularly Arab-Israel peace process. When assuming his office, Primakov stated that Russia's role in the West Asian peace process was "a minimal part, inadequate to its potential" and that he intended to increase her role. (Kreutz 2007: 58) At the end of January 1997, following the Hebron agreement between Israel and Palestinians, the Russian foreign ministry extended a series of invitations for West Asian leaders to visit Moscow, including Yasser Arafat, Benjamin Netanyahu, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and Syrian foreign minister Farouk Shara'a. In February 1997, Russian president Yeltsin met Arafat and promised support for the realization of Palestinian national rights including their right to self-determination. But at the same time, Russia was also improving its relations with Israel especially trade relations. In March 1997, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Moscow and warmly welcomed by Yeltsin signaling the continued improvement of relations between two countries. But Russian-Israeli relations setback negative turn due to two reasons in the late summer of 1997. First, Russian supply of missile technology to Iran which angered the Israel and; second, the Israeli-Palestinians peace process had suffered a series of major blows in the summer of 1997 because of Netanyahu's decision to construct a Jewish neighborhood in east Jerusalem and to conduct only a minimal (2.7%) withdrawal from the West Bank. On the other hand, and two major Palestinian terrorist attacks carried out in Jerusalem by Hamas in summer 1997 which blows Israeli-Palestinian peace process. (Freedman 1998: 159-162)

Wye Memorandum, 1998:

Like previous agreements since the Oslo peace accord of September 1993, the Wye memorandum was also signed at the White House, Washington DC on October 23, 1998. The agreement signed by the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to implement aspects of earlier agreements, notably the interim agreement or Oslo II held on September 28, 1995 and the Hebron protocol of January 15, 1997. The Wye Memorandum greatly surpassed previous agreements in its asymmetry and in the rigidity of the security commitments required of the Palestinian Authority. The Wye memorandum is about implementing Israeli redeployment in the West Bank during the period of five-year interim phase. Although, Hebron Protocol of January 15, 1997 was

signed by Netanyahu himself to implement the Israeli redeployment already agreed to in Oslo II, but the Hebron protocol were not carried out either. Hence, the concrete steps and timetable included into the Wye memorandum again for Israeli redeployment. (Aruri 1999: 17)

Under the Wye agreement, the land transfer scenario attained a new dimension as for the first time, Israel agreed to transfer 13% land from Area C, the largest portion of the West Bank territory under its control, out of 13%, 1% was to be transferred to Area A and 12% to Area B. In fact, there had been commitment to transfer 14.2% from Area B, which was under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, to Area A. In the final calculation, upon a total implementation of the Wye agreement, the Palestinians were to have full control over 40% of the total West Bank area (18.2% land of Area A and Area C and 21.8% land of Area B which was under joint control). The withdrawal had to take place in three phases with each phase relevant to PA's performance of certain tasks as per the Israeli direction (Azad 2000: 92-93).

But the implementations of the Wye memorandum never take place. Within a month of signing the accord, and only a minor transfer of land, Netanyahu suspended implementation of the agreement under pressure from the ultra-right parties of Israel (Azad 2000: 93).

Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum 1999

The unfinished task of Netanyahu government was expected to take up under Ehud Barak government by handling over nearly 11% of the occupied territories in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority. With the purpose to revise Wye agreement, an agreement was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on September 4, 1999. The agreement was overseen by US and it was witnessed by Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Jordanian king Abdullah. According to the agreement, the Israeli withdrawal was to take place in three states, all to be completed by January 2000. But Barak government made no substantial progress on the issue of land transfer (Azad 2000: 94-95).

While summarizing the President Yeltsin's tenure, regarding Arab-Israeli peace process, we can say that Russia under the Yeltsin presidency played a minor role in the

Arab-Israeli negotiations, despite, it held co-sponsorship along with the US, of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Technically, the co-sponsorship implies an equal role of both actors in terms of influence and activity in the process. The US-Russian partnership as co-sponsors in the Arab-Israeli peace process is lopsided, tilted towards the US. Russia has accepted as junior sponsor and often symbolic role in the sponsorship of the Arab-Israeli peace talks. The US has been directly or indirectly allowed to play the key role in bringing both parties- the Arab and Israel together and setting the agendas and venues for the peace process. Russia's weak role in the peace process can be blamed due to its unstable domestic political situation (Bahbah 1995).

Russia's policy towards Israeli-Palestinian peace process under Putin:

Russian President Vladimir Putin's accession to power in 2000, reflected in Russia's deeply involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. President Putin's tenure, in terms of Israeli-Palestinian disputes, can be subdivided into three parts. The first part was from January 2000 to April 2002, characterized by increasing Russian-Israeli cooperation in every field and a departure from former foreign minister Primakov's "pro-Arab" policy. The second part was considered to be from April 2002 to spring of 2005, characterized by no major changes in Russian-Israeli cooperation, but he (Putin) put greater emphasis on the question of Palestinian rights and criticized continued Israeli settlement in the occupied territories. The third part of Putin's policy towards Israeli-Palestinian dispute, whose origin can be traced back to the spring of 2005, was officially inaugurated by the President Putin on January 31, 2006 at the annual news conference for international journalists. The conference marked the Russia's shift towards a more independent foreign policy from the West regarding the Palestinians. (Kreutz 2007: 53)

President Putin supported West Asia peace process due to its geographical proximity to the region and to gain economic leverage. Moscow sees the Arab-Israel peace process as an opportunity to increase its resurgence in the region. Its role as the co-sponsor of the peace process initiated by the Madrid peace talks that allowed Moscow to cooperate with both parties and gained economic advantages. Putin kept himself away

from traditional Russian moral approach and sympathy towards the Palestinians while declaring political, moral and historical responsibility for the peace process. He attempted to maintain the same distance from both- Israelis and the Palestinians and to get benefits from both relationships. On March 9, 2000, the Russian ambassador to Israel, Mikhail Bikdanov visited the headquarters of the Palestinian movement at Orient House in Jerusalem to reaffirm Russia's commitment to supporting the Palestinians in their legitimate right to self-determination. He also indicated that the Jerusalem issue should be solved by bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and "any unilateral actions in the city must be stopped." By the end of June 2000, the Russian deputy foreign minister, Vasily Sredin, who was also the president's special envoy to the West Asia, visited Israel and Palestinian territories. During his meeting with Arafat, he assured him that "Moscow still support for the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to self-determination and creation of a state of their own." (Kreutz 2007: 68-69)

Camp David Summit, 2000

Soon after the Vladimir Putin's accession to the post of Russian President in May 2000, the Camp David summit was convened in July 2000 under the personal mediation of US President Bill Clinton. Although Russia endorsed the Clinton's effort and was nominally a co-sponsor of the ongoing peace talks, it was excluded from the further meetings held between July 11 and July 25, 2000. (Nizameddin 2013: 205) The Oslo Peace process which had been started in 1993, collapsed with the failure of the Camp David summit held in July 2000 and subsequent eruption of Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. (Smith 2013: 486)

The Camp David summit was called in hastily as the Ehud Barak's coalition government fallen and the Palestinian anger intensified as the Israeli settlement increased in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The period since 1993, the year of starting of the peace process, had witnessed the near doubling of the Israeli settlements, the vast expansion of the bypass road network built on occupied Arab territories, and more restrictions on Arab movement. (Smith 2013: 487-488)

Although Russia had not been invited to the Camp David summit of 2000 convened by the US bringing together Israel and Palestinian Authority, Moscow had played a major role to keep situation normal between Israel and Palestine and West Asia as a whole. Since 1999, Russia's efforts was to deter Palestinian leader Arafat from going ahead with his plan to proclaim an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on September 13, 2000. When on August 10, 2000, Arafat came to Moscow on a working visit, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov asked Arafat to exercise "extreme caution" on the timing of his decision to declare an independent Palestinian state unilaterally. During their talks, the Russian leaders were convincing Arafat to postpone the declaration of Palestinian independence, promising him that Moscow would assist Palestinians in negotiations with Israel in exchange (Kreutz 2007: 69-70).

Sharm al-Sheikh summit, October 2000:

Following the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process after the failure of Camp David summit, 2000, the Al-Aqsa Intifada¹² broke out in September 2000 in the territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war mainly in the West Bank (or Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip. In compare to first Intifada (1987-1993), which was characterized as a popular uprising, symbolized by youths throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, the second Intifada was characterized much more by armed attacks and terrorism, perpetrated by Hamas, Jihad and Palestinian Authority forces. Second Intifada caused more casualties on both sides in compare to first Intifada. During the four and half years into the second Intifada, nearly 1000 Israelis were killed and over 7000 were wounded. On the other hand, nearly 3,500 Palestinians were killed and over 28,000 were injured. (Shamir et al. 2006: 570)

Understanding the violent situation, the US President Bill Clinton called a summit on October 17, 2000, at Sharm al-Sheikh involving the Israel and Palestinian Authority as well as the Americans, Egyptians, Jordanians, the UN and the EU, tried to chart a way

¹² Intifada is an Arabic word for "uprising" literally translated as "shaking off". While the Palestinians consider it to be a war of national liberation against occupation, the Israelis consider it to be a terrorist campaign, and right-wing Israeli circles refer to it as the "Oslo War". (Shamir et. al. 2006: 570)

forward. The US President Clinton announced an international fact-finding committee to investigate the causes of the second Intifada (Al-Aqsa Intifada) and suggest ways to prevent their recurrence. The committee was chaired by US senator George Mitchell comprising Javier Salona from EU, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, Norwegian foreign affairs minister Thorbjørn Jagland, and former senator Warren B. Rudman. But when the committee presented its report on April 30, 2001, the political leadership had been changed in both countries- Israel and the US. The new US president George W. Bush showed little interest in that matter. Representatives of the Israel and Palestine Authority met at Taba, Egypt to explore the Mitchell report in January 2001 (Fraser 1995: 156).

Russian President Putin decided not to attend or send Russian representatives to the October 2000 Sharm el-Sheikh summit. Because he had been disappointed with the US unilateralism and decided to avoid any process in which the US dominated. At the same time, Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov made clear that the Russian government would oppose any UN Security Council resolution authorizing an UN peacekeeping force for the West Bank and Gaza so long as Israel opposed it. Nevertheless, in March 2001, Russia voted in favor of a resolution to dispatch international observers to Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Russia repeated the pattern in September 2003 when the UN Security Council considered a resolution demanding that Israel not expel Arafat from the West Bank and Gaza. The US vetoed the resolution while Russia voted in favor. However, Russia mitigated its traditional pro-Arab position with subsequent statements complaining that the Security Council vote had been “rushed”. (Katz 2005: 3-4)

Although Russian leadership, formally, did not attend the Sharm el-Sheikh summit of October 2000, but Russian officials have frequently visited the West Asia and occasionally hosted Palestinian leaders including Yasser Arafat, who visited Moscow at least three times (in August 2000, November 2000, and May 2001), after the breakdown of the US-sponsored negotiations. During Arafat’s visit to Moscow in November 2000, Putin praised Arafat for his peacemaking efforts but also mentioned “the great contribution to the settlement process made by the Israeli leaders” with whom Russia was in constant contact. In fact, at this meeting, President Putin arranged an Israeli-Palestinian

“virtual summit” in his office, when he telephoned to the Israeli PM Ehud Barak and handed the receiver to Arafat. After a long time both leaders spoke directly to each other. The Russian leaderships considered their mediation to be a great political success, but Russia’s contribution to the peace, according to Andrei Piontkovsky, Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Moscow, was as mainly ‘symbolic’ and without any real consequences. (Kreutz 2007: 70-71)

When PLO leader Yasser Arafat made next visit to Moscow in May 2001, President Putin and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov observed the principle of “equal proximity to the two parties to the conflict.” Arafat requested Putin to involve greatly as co-sponsor of the West Asia peace process. President Putin and Igor Ivanov replied that the Russian and the US positions on the West Asia disputes were “close or identical.” When Yevgeny Primakov, (then leader of the Fatherland-All Russia parliament group at the State Duma) blamed Israel for worsened condition in the occupied territories, the Kremlin expressed disagrees with his views and stated that Russia is in a role of mediator and should not take side of any parties. Primakov was also harshly attacked by the pro-Israeli media for his comments. (Kreutz 2007: 71)

The Israeli leaders appreciated the Putin’s policy. When Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres visited Moscow in May 2001, he praised President Putin in the following words: “Your policies meet our expectations.” Then Israeli prime minister also shared same opinion when he met President Putin in September 2001, and said that “the Russians have no desire to replace the US as mediators. Their position is much closer to the American one than the European one- the Russians are not pressuring us to bring international observers”. Russia also concerned about the safety of Russian-speaking Diaspora in Israel in the wake of an outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000. According to popular Russian expectations, Russian Jews in Israel could serve as a “unique bridge, linking Russia and the West in science and technology”. In fact, there have been number of examples of Russian-Israeli business and technological ventures and cooperation. For example, Russian launch vehicles were employed on two Israeli satellites in 1998 and 2000. (Kreutz 2007: 71)

Taba negotiations, January 2001:

The Taba discussions were a last-ditch effort based on the Clinton parameters of December 23, 2000, where President Clinton had proposed the way for the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli disputes including territorial dispute, status of Jerusalem and refugees problem. President Clinton proposed that the Palestinians get 94-96 percent of the West Bank in exchange for the remaining major Israeli settlements. As for Jerusalem, the Arab neighborhood and Old City would be ceded to Palestine and Jewish neighborhood and extended East Jerusalem would be under the Israeli sovereignty. Regarding the refugee problem, only a small portion of the Palestinians in exile could return, but Israel would not negate the aspiration of the Palestinian people to return to former Palestine. (Smith 2013: 495-496)

In order to discuss on the Clinton Parameters, the representatives of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority met at Taba, Egypt in January 2001. But the Taba negotiations broke up on January 27, 2001 without reaching any final agreement. (Fraser 2004: 157) The Taba negotiations were split into many groups in a bid to resolve the differences between Israel and Palestinian. These primarily concerned land and borders, security, refugees and status of Jerusalem. The committee on the security issues was hardly convened. On the territorial issue, Israeli delegate Shlomo Ben-Ami insisted to negotiate within the Clinton parameters, but quickly moved toward the upper end of the 95-97 percent zone at Palestinian insistence. The Palestinian team had also drawn up a map, in which he insisted that Israel was to evacuate 130 out of 146 settlements. That proposal would affect 100,000-120,000 Israeli settlers- three to four times the number contemplated by Clinton and Israeli PM Barak. This proposal came as a shock to the Israelis since the Palestinians, at Camp David summit, had agreed that Israel could retain two settlement blocs that would contain the highest concentration of settlements, as well as Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Finally, the differences between the two sides resulted in the failure of the agreements. (Makovsky 2003: 122-125)

The disagreements over the land dispute were joined by the disagreements on the status of the Jerusalem. Earlier the Palestinian President Arafat had rejected the idea at

Camp David summit that Israel and Palestinians would share the Temple Mount (for Muslims, Haram al-Sharif) and insisted that full Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif would be under the Palestinian sovereignty. Finally, on the issue of Jerusalem, the basis at Camp David for negotiations regarding the Old City and the surrounding areas such as the Mount of Olives was that all this area would be a “Holy Basin” where a special regime would be enforced, and where no side would have full sovereignty. The Palestinians rejected this idea completely at Taba. (Makovsky 2003: 122-125) The Taba discussions’ failure vested in its nature of participants. The leaders of both sides i.e. Israeli PM Barak and Palestinian leader Arafat showed little interest for the Taba discussions and did not attend the negotiations personally. (Smith 2013: 496)

Russia’s approach towards Arab-Israel conflicts after 9/11 terror attack:

The terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon in New York and Washington respectively on September 11, 2001 shocked the world. The world community saw the cruel face of terrorism. Before 9/11 terror attacks in the US, Russian policy was based upon the need to balance the US power and restrain its unipolarity through the promotion of global multipolarity- a system of global checks and balances. After the 9/11 terror attacks, Russia sought a ‘military alliance’ with US against the ‘common military enemy’. Russia’s stance was clearly expressed by Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov, who declared that, the implications of the 9/11 terror attacks went “far beyond the borders of the US....The international terrorism has caused a blatant challenge to all civilized humanity, to the entire civilized world.” (Ambrosio 2005: 1189) After the 9/11 terror attacks at Washington, the Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his support to the US on her ‘war on terror’ and moved to form a tactical alliance with the US because the Taliban in Afghanistan was as much a threat to Russia and Central Asian states as was to the US. The Russian President Putin supported US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and promised to provide weapons to the NATO in Afghanistan. He also offered Russian Airspace to US airplanes for humanitarian flights, and to participate in search and rescue operations. When the leaders of the Central Asian states offered airbases to the coalition forces for the attack on Afghanistan, Putin announced that he had approved. (Light 2008: 29) In response, the US Senator Joseph

Biden, former chairman of the Senate Foreign relations committee, proclaimed that “No Russian leader since Peter the Great has cast his lot as much with the West as Putin has.” (Ambrosio 2005: 1190)

The 9/11 terror attacks on the US cities had far-reaching impact on Arab-Israel conflict. Declaring a ‘War against Terrorism’ the US President Bush prepared for an attack on Al-Qaeda’s Afghan base. Al-Qaeda is an Islamic terrorist group, comprising largely Arab but based in Afghanistan. Although Israel is the natural partner in this ‘war on terror’, but as the US and her allies engaged in Afghanistan, the Palestinian issue needs to push one side. Knowing the significance of the Arab-Israeli conflict for their Afghan expedition, the US president Bush and his principal ally British Prime Minister Tony Blair, affirmed their support for Palestinian statehood to seek the Arabs support for Afghanistan expedition. (Fraser 1995: 159) Immediately after the terrorist attacks, the US sought to build a coalition including Arab states against Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda terror organization. In an effort to gain support of Arab countries, the US affirmed her support for a Palestinian statehood. Before September 11, the US administration was following pro-Israeli policy with regard to Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US president Bush also pursued Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to agree to a meeting between Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Arafat to establish yet another ceasefire between two sides. (Freedman 2005)

In April 2002, the Israel’s move to close Jenin and its surrounding areas to the media and relief organizations caused a strong reaction in Russia. The Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov stated to the Russian media: “the refugee camp was completely flattened and nobody can tell now how many victims are buried under the debris... Clearly such developments cannot be accounted for, and even less justified as any resistance to terrorism.” On April 24, 2002, the Russian State Duma criticized the Israelis actions and asked Israeli leaders to ‘shut down the violence immediately’ and warned that if Israel would not obey the international demands and continuously ignored it, there would be serious step including economic and other actions can be taken against it. (Kreutz 2007: 73)

‘Quartet’ on the West Asia

The failure of the Camp David summit of July 2000 and subsequently outbreak of the second intifada or Al-Aqsa intifada in the late September 2000 forced international community to give attention on the burning issue of Arab-Israel conflict which has been disturbed the entire West Asia region and the world as well. For the first time in the history, four major players- the US, UN, the European Union (EU) and Russian Federation came together to solve the Arab-Israel conflicts. The group of these four major players met together and formed a permanent forum in Madrid in 2002 sometimes known as ‘Quartet’. (Musu 2007: 4) The ‘West Asia Quartet’ came into being after a meeting of foreign ministers in Madrid in April 2002. The meeting was attended by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, EU high representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Salona, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Russian foreign ministers Sergei Lavrov. These four parties issued a joint communiqué resulting from the meeting, called for an end to the violence and that was the first official act of the ‘four major actors on the West Asia’. (Tocci 2013: 30)

The official aim of the ‘Quartet’ was to create a multilateral framework for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), alongside the “land for peace” principle inducted in the Oslo Peace process. Actually, the main purpose of the ‘Quartet members’ was to pursue a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, as affirmed by UNSC Resolution 1397 and endorsed by the former US President George W. Bush. The ‘Quartet group’ also lent its support to Saudi peace initiative, later accepted by the Arab League in March 2002 and now known as Arab Peace Initiative, which predicted the normalization of Israel’s relations with all Arab countries including Palestinian, Syria and Lebanon. However, the ‘West Asia Quartet’ did not aim to replace the US-led Arab-Israeli peace process and nor did it aim to reverse the principles of the Oslo peace process, rather it aimed to instill new momentum in the dying peace process with the support of three major players: the EU, the UN and Russia alongside the US. (Tocci 2013: 31) The Putin administration expressed its support to the ‘Quartet principles’ and declined the Arab requests to become a more forceful

intermediary. In other words, Russia strongly supported US initiatives and expressed its satisfaction with its role as a responsible member of the so-called ‘Quartet on the West Asia’. (Dannreuther 2004: 37)

Russia as a member of the Quartet, focused on four major differences: first, the status and importance of Yasser Arafat both before and after his death; second, the international legality and political acceptability of the “separation fence” which Israel has built in the occupied territories; third, the legal nature of the road map proposed by the Quartet to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the means of its implementation; fourth, Condemnation of Israel’s use of excessive military force and repression in the occupied territories and its need to make at least some tangible concessions for the beleaguered Palestinians. (Kreutz 2007: 73)

Since the formation of the ‘West Asia Quartet’ in 2002, its representative have met regularly (between three and six times per year) and issued a series of joint statements and have conducted a number of key initiatives. The Quartet is endorsed by the UNSC Resolution 1435 (September 2002), has nominated high-level personalities including James Wolfensohn and Tony Blair to act on its behalf and has developed an operational capability to support their missions. (Tocci 2013: 31-32) Since beginning, the ‘Quartet’ immersed itself in the question of Palestinian reform. The Quartet issued a joint statement in July 2002, which was consistent with the US President Bush’s June 24 statement, expresses strong support for achieving the goal of final Israeli-Palestinian settlement within three years from now. To do so, the Quartet based itself on the 100-day reform program published by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in early 2002 and established an International Task Force on Palestinian Reform under its aegis. Beyond the Quartet representative, the Task Force included other major donors to the PA, namely Canada, Japan, Norway, the IMF, and the World Bank. It also met regularly with the representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Syria. The Task Force established seven working groups on the multiple aspects of the PA reform: financial accountability, civil society, local government, elections, judicial reform, administrative reform and the market economy. (Tocci 2013: 32)

The Road Map

The Road Map was jointly prepared by the ‘Quartet members’ namely the US, the EU, the Russian Federation and the UN during the summer of 2002. Drafts of the Road Map were prepared, but the official announcement of it was withheld until April 30, 2003. After several iterations, the final draft of the Road Map was published in April 2003 and was subsequently endorsed by the UNSC Resolution 1515 in November 2003. Despite the international aura attached to the document, the US later modified the Road Map to suit Israel without consulting other Quartet members. (Tocci 2013: 33; Smith 2013: 507)

The Road Map set out three development phases. To undertake phase one, the Palestinian leadership would have “issue an unequivocal statement reiterating Israel’s right to exist.” The State of Israel, on the other hand, would have to issue a similar statement “affirming its commitment to the two-state vision of an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian state”. The Road Map was a “performance-based” document which means the Palestinians and Israelis should simultaneously take steps to end the violence and restore the peace and mutual confidence. The Palestinians should immediately cease all violence and begin to build new political institutions. And Israelis, in its part, should freeze settlement activity, as called for in the Mitchell report, and begin to dismantling the settlement outposts’ build-up since March 2001, the date Ariel Sharon assumed the office. (Smith 2013: 507) By inserting Palestinian reform in phase one, and directly working on this task, the Quartet aimed at putting the Road Map immediately into action by inducing Israel’s reciprocal steps and thus re-launching the peace process. (Tocci 2013: 33)

Russia’s role in the ‘Quartet on West Asia’

Russia, as a member of the Quartet, played major role in the formation of the ‘Road Map for Peace’. Russia opposed the US when it tried to enforce her decision. For example, when US president George W. Bush, in 2003, urged other states to join the US and Israel in shunning Arafat to force the Palestinians to select a more pliant leader, this move was flatly opposed by Russia. And Russia’s stance was reflected during the visit of

Russian foreign minister's middle east envoy, Aleksander Kalugin to the Cairo on October 11, 2003 where he stated that Russia considered, "Yasser Arafat as the chairman of the Palestinian Authority and maintains contacts with him in this capacity and as the legally elected head of the organization". (Kreutz 2007: 73-74)

Russia with the other members of the Quartet namely the US, the EU and the UN, adopted the road map to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to establish an independent Palestinian state by 2005. Here, Russia was more active than the US in persuading the both parties to provide the situation for the practical implementation of the road map proposals. Despite the Israel's opposition, expressed during Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to Moscow on November 3, 2003, Russia introduced a draft resolution to the UN Security Council, called UN Security Council resolution 1515 that approved the Road map proposals and asked the both parties- Israelis and Palestinians to meet their road map commitments and cooperate with the Quartet. This resolution was also co-sponsored by China, Guinea, Spain, and Great Britain and unanimously adopted on November 9, 2003. (Kreutz 2007: 74-75) The Arabs world and Palestinian welcomed the UN Security Council resolution 1515 and praised Moscow for her major diplomatic achievements. Israel, on the other hand, reacted negatively to the resolution 1515 and expressed that it did not feel bound by the resolution because it did not involve the US pressure for supporting the issues. And without the US pressure, the new resolution had no practical importance. Despite the little success of the resolution, Russia's position remains unchanged on the issue of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On December 3, 2003, the Russian ambassador to the UN, Sergei Lavrov, asked that while the "Palestinian leadership must adopt effective measures to prevent the actions of extremists and terrorists..... Israel, on its part, should reject the non-proportional rise of force and non-judicial reprisals, and take effective steps to ease the economic hardship of the Palestinian people who are living through an acute humanitarian disaster." He added that "Israel's right to self-defense should be observed in the context of generally recognized international humanitarian standards." (Kreutz 2007: 75)

Although the US government expressed reservations towards the Israeli construction of the "separation fence" in the occupied territories, the American position

was ambiguous. Russia expressed stronger opposition to the fence and linked it with negative assessments of the Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On October 3, 2003, the Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov in his statement, asserted that settlement activity including the construction of “security fence” which is dividing the Palestinian lands and local peoples, must be stopped. The EU also adopted the same position as was Russia on the issue of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied areas. The EU, on November 18, 2003, also called on Israel to stop the construction of security fence in the West Bank, and stressed that it would not solve the problems rather it would worsen the conditions of Palestinians more. But Russia’s position became weak when US vetoed on UN Security Council resolution, which condemned the Israelis activity in Palestine, including the building of security fence in the West Bank. Russia expressed regret to the Palestinians. (Kreutz 2007: 74)

Russia’s approach towards Iraq war and Arab-Israel conflict:

The Iraq war of 2003 or second Gulf Crisis reflected the authoritarian nature of the US and its major ally Britain. Unlike the first Gulf Crisis of 1991, the international community did not support the US move in this war. The US President George W. Bush spread false message among world community that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein have kept weapons of mass destruction (WMD), posing a serious threat to the international security. He also misinterpreted Iraq’s role in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On February 26, 2003, the US President Bush made a speech linked his policies on Iraq to the prospects for progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. He declared that ‘success in Iraq’ could begin a new stage for West Asia peace process and set a motion progress towards a truly democratic Palestinian state. The scenario presented by him was that the removal of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would deprive terrorist network of a patron, and hence encourage Palestinians to choose new leaders, ‘leaders who strive for peace’. As the threat of terror was removed, Israel would be expected to support the creation of a viable Palestinian state and to bring an end to settlement activities. (Fraser 1995: 169)

Unlike the Russian support to the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Russia opposed to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Iraq Crisis of 2003 marked one of the

most significant great power disputes in the post-Cold War era. In September 2002, the US President George W. Bush addressed the UN General Assembly and unofficially expressed his decision to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. He accused Saddam Hussein for violating international law and trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD). He also accused Saddam Hussein for violation of Human rights of Iraqi people. The US President Bush made it clear that ‘if the United Nations would not act, the US would act itself’. (Ambrosio 2005: 1197)

The Russian leadership immediately reacted to the Bush’s statements and asked for the international cooperation on Iraq issue. The Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov cited that Russian government would cooperate with the UN on Iraqi issue and he also warned against the US for taking unilateral action. Soon after the Bush’ remarks on Iraq issue, the Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and emphasized the need for a common stance on Iraq issue. Kozyrev asserted that it is necessary for the further strengthening of the UN as a central mechanism to ensure security, stability and the regulation of international relations for developing multipolar world order. It was clear that the US’ unilateral actions on Iraq outside the UN structure would undermine the UN Security Council and circumvent Russia’s veto power and its status as a permanent member of UN Security Council. Russia insists the US to allow UN inspectors to inspect the Iraqi arsenal. Only if the prohibited weapons were found in Iraq, Moscow would consider other actions. (Ambrosio 2005: 1197-1198)

In September 2002, a draft resolution was circulated amongst the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The resolution articulated that Iraq has failed to comply with the prior UNSC demands that would automatically allow states to use ‘all necessary means to restore international peace and security in Iraq’. The Russian Federation along with France and China rejected the US and UK backed resolution, and proposed that two-step process needed to resolve the Iraqi issue. First, enforce the Iraqi government to allow UN inspections of its alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program; second, if Iraqi government refused to cooperate with UN Security Council, then begin discussions of the UN Security Council’s reaction. The joint position of

Russia, France and China was consistent with Russia's earlier stand over Iraq crisis. (Ambrosio 2005: 1198-1199)

Russian president Vladimir Putin strongly condemned the US attacks on Iraq and said that any military operation must be approved by the UN Security Council. Putin did not question about the goals of the war, nor did he counter the false arguments given by the US administration as grounds for the Iraqi war. He just called for national sovereignty and integrity to be respected and international law to be observed before any move, and he added that only the UN Security Council has the authority to reach a reasonable decision over Iraq. Vladimir Putin adopted this attitude just before the Azores summit, at which the US president George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Spain's Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar gave final ultimatum to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, having failed to get the support of the Security Council. Like the German and French heads of government, President Putin presents himself as a defender of the foundations of post-war order against American imperialism. However, within Russian ruling elite a certain consensus had developed that while it did not support the US in Iraqi war, it also did not approve of breaking with America in favor of an alliance with Europe. For example, Leonid Slutski, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee for International Affairs, declared, "If Russia moved toward an anti-American tripartite alliance with France and Germany.... this tactically favorable step would lead to a strategic defeat." (Volkov 2003)

Vladimir Putin adopted this attitude just before the Azores summit, at which the US president George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Spain's Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar gave final ultimatum to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, having failed to get the support of the Security Council (Volkov 2003). At that time Putin had fastened himself with French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who also criticized the behavior of the US. Like the German and French heads of government, he presented himself as a defender of the foundations of post-war order against American imperialism. However, within Russian ruling elite a certain consensus had developed that while it did not support the US in Iraqi war, it also did not approve of breaking with America in favor of an alliance with Europe. For

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The Russian nationalists propose various scenarios for how the war could be used to stabilize Russian geopolitical influence. The notorious right-wing leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has already declared: “We should behave worse than the Americans.” He has called alternately for Russia to send a massive military force to the Middle East, to establish pro-Russian regimes in the Transcaucasia and Central Asia, and to crush the Baltic States economically. By these and other means he proposes to elevate Russia once again to the rank of a superpower. Zhirinovskiy said, “Of course we are sorry for Iraq but the Iraq war is a great moment for Russia.” However, Vladimir Putin appeared in a role of a peacemaker. He condemned the ultimatum came out from the Azores summit and justified his attitude with the fact that over 20 million Muslims live in Russia. “We cannot ignore their opinion,” he declared, without regard for the fact that in Iraq it is not the fate of a religious regime, but a secular one, that is at stake. (Volkov 2003)

Russia’s policy towards Second Lebanon War

The Second Lebanon War outburst happened after the abduction of two IDF (Israel Defense Forces) soldiers on July 12, 2006 by Lebanon-based Hezbollah on the border between Israel and Lebanon. Following the abduction of two Israeli soldiers, the Israel launched heavy airstrike that targets Hezbollah and its residential neighborhoods. Hezbollah, in response, gradually escalated its attacks and fired missiles and Katyusha rockets at Israel’s northern towns, causing extensive damage to the property. It was the largest attack on Israel’s civilian population since the war of independence in 1948. Israel also reacted aggressively and started ground raids from second week of the war, aimed at pushing Hezbollah outposts away from the border and later taking control of Katyusha launch sites. After a month of the intensive fighting, the war brought to an end by the ceasefire brokered by the UNSC resolutions 1701, which was determined that the Lebanese Army and a multi-national force would be deployed in southern Lebanon along the Israeli border. (Levy 2009: 3-4)

The war was proved to be disastrous for the Lebanon. Israel imposed an air, land and sea blockade almost completely severing the country from the outside world for approximately eight weeks- from July 13, 2006 to September 8, 2006. Lebanon's infrastructure and economy were destroyed and its industries and exports were curtailed, and foreign investments were ceased besides. Israel also dismembered Lebanon by the systematic destruction of its roads, bridges, airports, harbors, telecommunication facilities, fuel supplies and reservoirs, electricity facilities and factories etc. As a result, Lebanon incurred over \$15 billion in damage and revenues loss. In terms of human resources, the war resulted in more than one million displaced; 1200 dead (one-third of whom were children under the age of 12) and over 4000 were wounded and handicapped. On the other hand, Israel incurred around \$6 billion of financial losses in Hezbollah attacks. Hezbollah fired 4000 rockets into Israeli territory that resulted in 158 Israelis dead (around two-thirds of them were soldiers) and 5000 Israelis were wounded. (Alagha 2008: 2-3)

Russia's position on the crisis was clearer than at any time in recent years and was based on four pillars. First, Russia views all conflicts in this region as interconnected and, therefore, calls for internationally-backed diplomatic action in order to deal with any manifestation of the conflict, whether it is Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian or Israeli-Palestinian. Russia condemned Hezbollah's provocative actions in the UN Security Council but strongly supported Lebanon as a victim of Israeli aggression and insisted on UN control over any peace operation. Russia also attempted to re-animate the Arab League's idea to convene a comprehensive peace conference on the West Asian conflicts, but this demand was rejected by the US and Israel. Russia has also expressed its readiness to launch an investigation into Israeli claims of alleged transfers of Soviet/Russian made weapons to Hezbollah via third-party nations. Second pillar of Russian policy is engagement with the major non-state actors of the region. Russia views Hezbollah as a key representative of the Lebanese Shia community, with the capability to undermine any conflict resolution efforts if it is left out of the stabilization process. Russia also views Hamas as a major Palestinian actor that earned legitimacy through electoral victory. Neither Hezbollah nor Hamas is listed by Russia as a terrorist organization, since Russia's list includes only groups that directly threaten Russia's security. Russia seeks to politically engage with

groups that are not just militant but involved in political, religious, social, humanitarian, and other non-violent action. Third pillar of Russia's policy is related to the economic. Russia is the only major country which is not dependent on Arab countries for its energy needs. Therefore, Russia has developed new interests in the region and established/re-established economic relations with all major countries of the region, including cooperation with Israel in information technology, communications, and energy and diamond trade. Russia has also developed cooperation with Syria in the field of military-technical and oil and gas sector. Extending its involvement from emergency relief to longer-term reconstruction assistance, Russia allocated \$20 million to deploy an engineering and de-mining battalion, guarded by ethnic Chechen soldiers, to repair roads and bridges (Stepanova 2006: 3-4).

Growing humanitarian involvement is a new and promising direction for Russian foreign policy. In many regional contexts beyond Lebanon, it is more advantageous for Russia to be associated with humanitarian convoys than with armed peacekeepers, let alone military involvement. Even though it is too early to call Russia a major humanitarian power, it is becoming an active reconstruction contractor and a major emergency aid facilitator. (Stepanova 2006: 4)

Annapolis conference, 2007:

In the spring of 2007, the then US President George W. Bush had decided to launch a fresh effort to bring peace in the West Asia region. President Bush expressed his vision in his speech on July 16, 2007 outlining "West Bank first" vision and called for an international summit in fall 2007 to restart the Israeli-Palestinian final status negotiations, which had been suspended since 2001. After outlining his vision in his speech on July 16, President Bush phone Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas and the leader of other Arab countries- Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to discuss the idea. In September, the US administration persuaded PA President Mahmud Abbas and Israeli PM Ehud Olmert to form teams to draft a joint declaration presenting a common vision for advancing the peace process. (The Annapolis Conference 2008: 74)

The conference arranged by the US President Bush was held in November 2007 at Annapolis, Maryland, USA. The declared goal of the conference was to achieve a

comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestinian by the end of 2008, when the President Bush's term of office expired. The heads of the many Arab countries were invited including officials from the Syria. But the US administration excluded the Hamas since the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks would be negotiated between Israel and Fatah. The US President Bush announced that the US only supervises the implementation of the Road Map for ongoing bilateral talks between Fatah-led Palestinian Authority leader Abbas and Israeli PM Ehud Olmert. Ignoring the international input, all this was finalized in an Israeli-PLO joint understanding hammered out just fifteen minutes before the conference opened, despite the fact that most of the Arab states that had signed the Arab League Peace Initiative of 2002, including Saudi Arabia, had attended the conference. (Smith 2013: 516-517)

Israeli PM Olmert and PA leader Abbas met several times in the coming year, but no progress was made. Although PM Olmert announced on several occasions that peace would require Israeli withdrawal from the most of the West Bank and nearly all of East Jerusalem. However, the Jewish settlement in the West Bank and extension of Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem continued. (Smith 2013: 517)

The Annapolis Conference that held in Maryland, US to promote peace in the West Asia might have brought Israelis and Palestinians closer together, but it had broadened the gap between Russia and the US. While Russia continues accusing the US of encroaching on its security interests, the US carries on with its democracy lessons. (Annapolis conference sparks new Russia-US dispute)

Palestine: as an UN observer State

On September 23, 2011, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formally requested for full membership in the United Nations for a Palestinian state on the basis of pre-1967 Arab-Israeli war borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. President Mahmoud Abbas has clarified that this move was not meant to de-legitimize or isolate Israel but it was an effort to revive gridlocked negotiations. However, the US administration undermined his effort for Palestinian Statehood bid in the UN Security Council. (Blarel 2011: 2; Smith 2013: 522)

President Abbas' bid for full membership in the UN can be seen as logical and symbolic step towards international recognition of the Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian quest for statehood began in 1947 when the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended the partition of Palestine into two states- a Jewish and an Arab state. The Palestinian statehood became a tangible political reality in 1988 when the PLO leader Yasser Arafat unilaterally proclaimed the establishment of a new Palestine state. President Abbas has delineated his actions as an act of "peaceful defiance" to the current Israeli strategy of settlements in the occupied territories, which Abbas narrated as an "entrenching occupation" of the Palestinian land. (Blarel 2011: 2)

The Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, in his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2011 dismissed the Abbas' application for Palestinian statehood and described it as premature step. He emphasized on the need for a bilateral peace talks and mentioned the UN forum as a "theatre of the absurd." PM Netanyahu also emphasized on Israel's existential threat from Islamic militants and Israel's need for strategic depth, thereby implicitly rebuffing any negotiations based on pre-1967 borders. (Blarel 2011: 3)

President Abbas' initiative has also demonstrated strong divisions within the Quartet, questioning its legitimacy as an efficient mediating mechanism. For example, Russia supported the Palestinian bid by September 12, 2011, while UK and France have not yet made their voting intentions official. The US has already supported the Israeli cause. Thus, the Quartet's position of Palestinian Statehood bid remains vague. (Blarel 2011: 3)

Finally, amidst this disarray, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has suggested a 'non-member observer status' (like the Vatican, Taiwan and Kosovo) for Palestine. This may help in checking the risk of violence and demonstrations breaking out in the Arab world in case of veto or 'no' vote at the UN Security Council and may also reduce the chances of Israel getting further isolated in the region. Abbas has accepted that alternative suggested by Sarkozy and indicated that the French proposal can be considered, notably as an option B, if the statehood bid is not accepted at the UNSC. (Blarel 2011: 3)

In January 2012, the Israeli-Palestinians negotiators, under Jordanian auspices, hold talks in Amman, where Israeli representative declared that "their guiding principle

for drawing the borders of a future two-state solution would be for existing settlement blocks to become part of Israel”, cited US President Bush’s letter of 2004 to Israeli PM Sharon. The Palestinians negotiators immediately rejected the idea as inimical to any possibility of a viable Palestinian state, and reiterated his demand that the before 1967 war borders be the basis of talks. (Smith 2013: 522)

Gaza Conflict of 2014:

The Gaza conflict once again erupted in July 2014 when Hamas fired rockets and mortar fire on Israeli cities from Gaza Strip during June and early July 2014. In response to Hamas’s provocative missile strikes, the Israeli government, on July 7, 2014, ordered IDF to launch an aerial operation against Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, which is known as “Operation Protective Edge”. On July 17, 2014, the Israeli government authorized the entry of ground forces into a limited area of the Gaza Strip in response to the Hamas’s continued rejection of ceasefire initiatives, ongoing rocket and mortar fire and the execution of attacks in Israeli territory by sea and through cross-border tunnels. These ground forces were tasked with identifying and neutralizing the cross-border assault tunnels, which originated from the outskirts of the urban areas of the Gaza Strip. The ground forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip on August 5, after locating and neutralizing 32 cross-border assault tunnels, and despite ongoing rocket and mortar attacks against Israel. The 2014 Gaza conflict ended on August 26, 2014, with an unconditional ceasefire between Hamas and Israel¹³. (The 2014 Gaza Conflict: Factual and Legal Aspects)

Throughout Operation Protective Edge, Russia tried cautiously to offer its services to both sides, publicly as well as in private conversations with Israeli and Hamas representatives. To this extent, Russian President Putin spoke with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on July 23, 2014, and with Hamas leader on July 29, 2014, via its high rank official Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzouk, appealed to Russia, asking that it assume an active mediating role in the ceasefire negotiations. (Magen et. al. 2014: 1)

¹³ <http://mfa.gov.il/ProtectiveEdge/Pages/default.aspx>

During the cold war period, the Soviet Union was actively (directly or indirectly) involved in the Arab-Israeli conflicts. The Soviet policy in the West Asia was not ideologically-driven rather it was directed against the confrontation with the US. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, took the seat of co-sponsorship along with the lonely superpower US in the next Arab-Israeli peace talks. Although Russia under the Yeltsin presidency held the co-sponsorship of the Arab-Israeli peace process, its role was secondary to the US. When Vladimir Putin became the Russian president in 2000, Russia upgraded its role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Russia started to play equal role with the US, sometimes bigger role, in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Both parties- Israel and Arab countries expressed their hope in the Russian leadership as an independent broker in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Russia's active participation in the West Asia peace process upgraded its stature in the West Asia region and world as well.

Chapter IV

Russian Diaspora in Israel

The term ‘Diaspora’ has often been used to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland. (Faist 2010: 9) In Hebrew, the term ‘Diaspora’ initially referred to the setting of colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile. (Anteby-Yemini 2005: 262) Early studies of transnational migration focused on Diaspora were not necessarily related to religious groups. By the late 1980s, the term Diaspora moved beyond a literal meaning and linked to the Jewish Diaspora. (Cherry 2016: 198) Diaspora, in general, used today to describe any population which residing country is not the same as its originating country. These populations are considered as ‘de-territorialized’ or ‘transnational’ populations and whose political, social and economic networks extend beyond the borders of nation-states. Such populations are growing in prevalence, number and self-awareness in the current globalized world. Many Diaspora groups are emerging as significant players in the construction of national narratives, regional alliances or global political economies. (Vertovec 1997: 277)

Since the 1980s, the term ‘Diaspora’ has gained important position in academic debate, literature and public discourses. The nationalist governments or groups often use the concept of Diaspora to pursue agendas of nation-state building or controlling populations abroad. The concept is invoked to mobilize support for a group identity or some political gains. And sometimes, the concept is being used for the protection of ethnic minorities living in another country different from originating country. In the modern times, some countries used its Diasporic population to encourage financial investments and promote political loyalty among rich emigrants. (Faist 2010: 11)

Walker Connor has defined Diaspora as “the segment of a people living outside the homeland”. But this definition lost its meaning when scholars used this term without considering the soul of the definition. Scholars have applied the term to Cubans and Mexicans staying in the US, Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Pakistanis in

Britain, Turks in the Germany, Maghrebis in France, Greek and Polish minorities, blacks in north America, Palestinian Arabs, and the Caribbean, Indians and Armenians in various countries. William Safran later suggested that Connor's definition be extended and the concept of Diaspora should be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share all or some of the following characteristics: (1) they or their forefathers, have been dispersed from their original homeland to two or more 'peripheral' or foreign regions; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland, its physical location, history and achievements; (3) they believe that they are not- and perhaps cannot be- fully accepted by their host society and so they feel partly or fully alienated and insulted from it; (4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true and ideal homeland and to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when the conditions are appropriate; (5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and finally (6) they continue to relate themselves, directly or indirectly, to that homeland and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are defined by the existence of such a relationship. In respect to the above criterion, we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Turkish, Maghrebi, Cuban, Palestinian, Greek, and Chinese Diasporas at present and of the Polish Diaspora of the past, but none of them fully comply with the 'ideal type' of the Jewish Diaspora. (Safran 1991: 83-84)

There must be some relationship between Diasporic groups and an actual or imagined homeland. The idea of homeland provides the base from which Diasporan identity may develop. Older notions clearly imply a return to an (imagined) homeland with destination. In contrast to older notions, the newer uses of the concept have replaced the idea of return to homeland by cross-border linkages, as in the migration-development nexus. (Faist 2010: 12; Butler 2001: 192)

The Diasporic groups are consciously part of an ethno-national community and that consciousness binds the dispersed peoples not only to the homeland but to each other as well. This criterion of Diaspora is more relevant in the cases of that Diasporas whose homeland no longer exists, or who have been dispersed from the homeland long back ago. (Butler 2001: 192) The older notions implied that the migrants do not incorporate

fully into the country of settlement, making and maintaining gap vis-à-vis the majority group(s). The older notion is often concerned with the maintenance of boundaries by dominant group(s) against immigrants through discrimination. The newer notions of above characteristic emphasize the importance of cultural hybridity in the wake of dissemination. In line with older notions, the newer notions of Diaspora implies some sort of cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis the other groups. (Faist 2010: 12-13)

Jewish Immigration to the Palestine

In the late 19th century, a Jewish national movement emerged in Europe with the aim of fostering the creation of Jewish national home in Palestine. (Maoz 2013: 30) The first major victory of the Zionist movement was the publication of the Balfour Declaration by Great Britain on November 2, 1917. The Balfour Declaration was addressed by Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, promised to establish a ‘national home’ for Jews in Palestine. The Declaration was subsequently approved by the allied powers of the First World War namely the US, France and Italy and subsequently approved and incorporated into the law of nations by the League of Nations. The declaration had set the foundation for the future State of Israel. (Shwadran 1948: 164; Rowley et. al. 2006: 47) The declaration mentioned:

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country” (Rowley et. al. 2006: 47).

As part of the post-World War I settlement, the League of Nations had conferred on Britain a mandate to administer Palestine. In pursuance of that mandate (which embodied the text of the Balfour Declaration) the Britain had assumed the obligation of facilitating Jewish immigration into Palestine. (Adams 1988: 74) During the British mandate in Palestine, the Jews started to immigrate to Palestine from other parts of the world. Following the World War I, a further wave of Jewish immigration occurred. Approximately 35000 pioneers entered the country, including Jews who were inspired by socialist values. The Jewish immigrations were met with the increasing hostility among

the Arab population, which erupted into the 1920 riots. Following the attack by the Arabs, the Jews agreed to establish a defense organization. The defense organization namely Haganah was established in March 1921 as a secret body, acting without the consent of the British authorities and was active to defend Jewish property and people. During this period of instability, Sir Herbert Samuel, British High Commissioner in Palestine, passed a Land Transfer Ordinance in August 1920, which made it possible for Zionists to acquire land. In addition, an Immigration Ordinance was passed in September 1920 that opened Palestine to legal Jewish immigration from those who obtained visas from the Zionist organization. Consequently, nearly ten thousand Jews had come into the country under Samuel's Immigration Ordinance by April 1921. During the Samuel's administration, there was a massive increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine. From 1920 to 1923, approximately eight thousand Jews a year had settled in the Holy Land. In 1924 the rate increased to about thirteen thousand, and in 1925, it was over thirty-three thousand. Such an influx of Jewish settlers resulted in a significant increase of Jews residing in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv. (Sherbok et. al. 2006: 22-26)

During the first decade of the British mandate, the Jewish immigration was on a limited scale- an average of eight-nine thousand Jews per year entered into Palestine during the period of 1920-1932. Since the Arab population was also increased, the demographic balance was not seriously affected. Since 1933 onwards, the year Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, the picture changed dramatically. In the next four years from 1933 to 1936 the average number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine increased five-fold, reached an annual average of more than 40,000 immigrants a year. (Adams 1988: 74)

A serious setback to the growth of 'Jewish national home' occurred when Great Britain had adopted new policy vis-à-vis Palestine on the eve of Second World War targeting to appease the Arab people. In 1939, Britain had issued 'White Paper' decided to limit the number of Jewish immigration to Palestine. Since the period of 1933-1936, the first three years of Adolf Hitler's reign, more than 130,000 Jewish people immigrated to Palestine which caused serious imbalance to the demographic situation of the Palestine. During this period, the Yishuv, or Jewish community in Palestine, grew by

about 80 percent. In the year of 1935 only, approximately 62,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, the highest number in a year. The Arab people of Palestine revolted against British mandate during the period of 1936-39. The Arab revolt of Palestine against British mandate was a direct outcome of the dramatic increase in Jewish immigration during the period of 1933-1936. In response to Arab revolt, the British government decided to retreat from its earlier position of partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. The British government had set an immigration quota of 75,000 Jews for five years, after which further immigration would be conditional upon Arab consent. (Kochavi 1998: 146)

The Zionist groups opposed the British policy of limiting the quota of Jewish immigration and they, in response, responded with a policy called *Aliyah Bet*, meaning illegal immigration. Illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine during the British Mandate was one of the most magnificent efforts organized by the Jews in the first half of the 20th century. The Jews called such immigration “Type B” (*Aliyah Bet*), to differentiate it from the official type of immigration (*Aliyah*) which was officially allowed by British government. *Aliyah Bet* or illegal immigration was an indication of the Diaspora’s desire to return to the Promised Land, and simultaneously fighting against the restrictive policy of Great Britain which had set the limit for Jewish immigration to Palestine. In due time *Aliyah Bet* became a national myth, part of the Jews’ collective consciousness. (Patek 2012: 9) An organization “*Mossad le Aliyah Bet*” was formed in 1937 in Paris to facilitate illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine. This organization was not the same as Israeli secret service, Mossad, that later developed by the State of Israel. Actually the Jews were unhappy with the restrictive policy of Great Britain. Further the British government had classified prospective immigrants according to wealth, profession and class. Those who were not fit into above category were refused to grant a visa to Palestine. The Jewish leaders were angry as the Jews were not being allowed to immigrate to Palestine because of their low economic conditions. Hence, the Zionist leaders attempted to find another way to send Jewish transport to Palestine illegally. On May 17, 1939, the British authorities published a new White Paper, which tightened the immigration regulations anew. In response to these new laws, the *Mossad le Aliyah Bet*, began to establish new offices in all European countries and sought immediate contact

with agencies in Berlin, particularly with the SS and the Gestapo. Since direct travel to Palestine was illegal, the immigrants sought visas from other countries, for example, from immigration authorities in ports that the ships would stop at on the way to Palestine. The Gestapo was highly involved in these illegal activities as well as in the chartering of suitable ships. In 1939 a number of ships arrived in Palestine, bringing thousands of illegal immigrants to the country. (Weckert 2016)

The Jewish immigration rate to Israel has varied throughout the country's history. The two major waves of mass Jewish immigration happened since the formation of State of Israel. The first wave of mass immigration happened in between 1948-1951 when the Jews from mainly Iraq, Romania, Poland and Yemen entered to Israel. In the following years, the immigration rate declined to a trickle from 1973 until the largest wave of immigration in 1990-1991. The second wave of mass immigration took place in the end of 1980s and continued till the 1990s. This wave was the result of end of restrictions on Soviet Jewish emigration during the course of liberalization processes in the USSR. The beginning of mass Russian Jewish emigration accompanied with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. (Khanin 2010: 6)

Russian Jewish emigration during the Cold War Period

Since the emergence of State of Israel as a sovereign country in May 1948, Israel has adopted liberal immigration policy towards Jewish people by virtue of Law of Return (1950), declaring that “every Jews have the natural right to return to their historic homeland”. And Israel's Law of Nationality, implemented in 1952, granted automatic Israeli citizenship to all Jewish immigrants on the arrival. Since the adoption of immigration and nationality policy, all Jewish people living in other parts of the world are entitled to immigrate to Israel and to receive Israeli citizenship on arrival. Israel's immigration and citizenship policies are based on the ethno-religious *Jus Sanguinis* (right of blood) criterion. Consequently, ethnicity plays a central role in Israel's public policy and political discourse. As a result of these *Jus Sanguinis*, the Jewish population of Israel had increased eightfold since the establishment of Israel as a sovereign country in 1948 until the end of 1988. Till the late 1990s, the Israeli population had reached 6.5 million, of whom 5.5 million (nearly 83 percent) were of Jewish people and the rest 17 percent

were composed of others with major proportion of Israeli Arabs. Moreover, because of ethnicity in Diaspora, the neutral word “immigrant” was replaced by the normative term “Oleh” (one who ascends) in Israel. Israeli government continues to encourage Aliyah (Jewish immigration to Israel) and sees it as contribution to country’s security and economic stability and international recognition of country’s legitimacy too. And the Israeli government never set the limit of number for Jewish immigration into Israel, especially from the former Soviet Union. In Israel, the potential immigrants need only to provide documentation attesting to their ethnic affiliation, without having to prove any cultural or emotional affinity for the Jewish people or acquaintance with Jewish traditions. (Elias 2008: 13-14; Bourhis et al. 2004: 120)

The UN partition plan of Palestine in November 1947 offered a state whose population composition consisted of approximately 55 percent Jews and 45 percent Arabs- almost a bi-national state. The 1948 war of Independence drastically changed this demographic situation in favor of Jews. David Ben-Gurion, one of the founder of the State of Israel and who later became first Prime Minister of Israel, believed that unless the Jewish population increased substantially, the state would be inherently unstable, cited the reason higher birth rate of the Arabs and the unremitting hostility of its neighbors. He termed the Jewish immigration into Israel is the highest mission of the State of Israel. As a result, in 1948, only 6 percent of world Jewish populations were living in Israel. Within three years since independence, this figure was goes up to double. And in 2005, about 38 percent of the world’s Jewish populations were living in Israel. (Shindler 2008: 62)

The Jews of Russian origin played an important role, in fact central role, in the history of Palestinian Jewry. They constituted the overwhelming majority in the pre-state Aliyah to Israel. In the 20th century alone, according to Jewish Agency and Ministry of Immigrant Absorption data, nearly 1.1 million immigrants entered to Palestine and Israel were from Russian empire/Soviet Union/former Soviet Republics. This includes 52,350 immigrants with Russian Jewish roots entered Palestine before the formation of State of Israel, 37,451 Soviet Jewish immigrants during the period from May 1948 to 1969; 149,740 Soviet Jews in the 1970s, 28,763 Soviet immigrants in 1980s, and 810, 727 Jews

from Russia and other Soviet Republics entered Israel during the last decade of the 20th century. In addition, more than 160,000 Russian-speaking Jews immigrated to Israel during the period of 2000-2009. As a result, nearly one-half of Israeli Jews are in some way related to Russia/Soviet Union/former Soviet Republics. (Khanin 2010: 6)

Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the CPSU, in his early years, was supportive of Jews as a nationality whose distinct culture and language would have to be considered if effective revolutionary work were to be performed among them. Thus he encouraged Yiddish culture and lent support to Jewish administrative institutions and agricultural settlements. At the beginning of his rule, Stalin discouraged anti-Semitism, but the late 1930s brought a resurgence of anti-Semitism. For example, Stalin permitted the revival of anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudices; those who were accused of anti-Semitism now received only light sentences. Stalin purged Jews from leadership positions in the communist party. Only Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin's trusted henchman, remained in a position of power. His family relationship with Stalin and his undoubted personal loyalty protected him from Stalin's purges of Jews. (Bloomberg 2004: 24-25) The 'Jewish culture' was also suffered setback under Stalin leadership in Soviet Union. Jewish culture was seen as a nationalist deviation. Religious education was banned. Zionism was outlawed and Hebrew books were suppressed. Circumcision or synagogue attendance would lead to banishment from the communist party and loss of employment. Jews chose to forgo circumcision and they remained uneducated Jewishly. (Bloomberg 2004: 24-25)

Although Soviet Union refused to allow emigration of Soviet Jews and prevented the Zionist imperative to facilitate the 'mobilization of the exiles', there was external Soviet support for Israel amidst the internal suppression of the Zionist movements. The last years of Stalin's life bore witness to a reign of terror against Jews of all political beliefs. (Shindler 2008: 62) The "black years" of Soviet Jewry began in 1948. Purges against Jews in public life were renewed. Jews could not serve in the Foreign Service or on the general staff of the communist party. Stalin began to see Jews as "cosmopolitan nationalists" whose interests lay in America and in the new state of Israel. When Jews welcomed Golda Meir as the first Israeli ambassador to Moscow, Stalin saw this as a

symbol of continued Jewish internationalism and cosmopolitanism, as a deficiency in their soviet patriotism. The black years peaked with the “Doctors Plot” of 1953, when Stalin claimed that a group of prominent Soviet Jewish physicians were plotting to poison Soviet leaders. This “plot” served as the basis for more purges and deportations. (Bloomberg 2004: 25-26)

Regardless of the Jews repression, the Soviet Union permitted the return of 150,000 Polish Jews to Poland after the end of World War II and from there many Jews immigrated to Israel. Although Jews emigration from the Soviet Union itself was interrupted and Zionist activity was subject to imprisonment in strict regime labour camps, almost 300,000 Jews from East European countries reached to Israel during the first four years of establishment of Israel. Many Jews came out of fear that the borders would soon be closed by the new communist states, others out of profound insecurity in the aftermath of the Shoah (the Holocaust). However, there was no free emigration. The Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, had conducted negotiations with the communist governments of the East European countries to buy Jewish immigrants. The Hungarian government initially demanded \$80 per Jew before dramatically raised the price, the Rumanian government asked for \$100 and the Bulgarian regime demanded \$300 per person for Zionist prisoners. At last, mainly through funds raised by American Jews, some \$5 million was paid to Romania and Bulgaria to allow the emigration of 160,000 Jews. By the beginning of 1952, nearly one-third of all East European Jewish population had left for Israel. In contrast, the countries of Western Europe, Latin America, Australasia and South Africa sent less than 40,000 Jews which consist only two percent of their combined Jewish populations. (Shindler 2008: 62-63)

The six-day war of 1967 between Israel and the Arab countries changed everything, which ultimately provoked Soviet Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union. In this war, Moscow had provided arms and military equipments to Arab countries which had been captured or destroyed by Israel costing not less than \$2 billion. This humiliating defeat of the Arab countries led the Soviet Union to engage in a massive propaganda effort that labeled Zionism a “world threat.” The Soviet leadership depicted Soviet Jews as sinister power brokers funded by the unlimited wealth of world Jewry secretly. This

type of propaganda campaign by the Soviet Union strengthened the Jews' desire to emigrate. Some Soviet Jews had become convinced that the Soviet system was flawed and they preferred to live in the Jewish homeland. And others convinced that economic opportunities for Jews were unavailable in the Soviet Union since an unofficial quota system was prevailing in many jobs and professions. A small number of Soviet Jews were also concerned about their religious beliefs and they sought to recover their religious roots. (Bloomberg 2004: 26)

The resurgence of Jewish consciousness in the Soviet Union and increasing demand of Soviet Jews to emigrate from the country was largely felt throughout the world in 1971-72. This awakening of Soviet Jews was a long-delayed reaction to Soviet practice of anti-Semitism against Jews and systematic suppression of Jewish institutions, fomented by Israel's victory in the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967. The Jewish movement for emigration from the Soviet Union accelerated during the Simhat Torah celebrations in Moscow and other Soviet cities. The outside world got to know the intensity of the movement when reports began to appear in the Western press of petitions demanding "repatriation to their ancient homeland," often accompanied by a rejection of Soviet citizenship. (Bayer 1973: 210)

In the early 1970s, when the first wave of mass Soviet Jewish emigration gained momentum in the Soviet Union, state socialism was still in full force, distressed by political and economic stagnation. The communist party of the Soviet Union was still controlling the cultural activity of the country and it remains continued confrontations with West. At that time, Soviet mass media spread false propaganda about Israel and made no distinction between Zionists and all Jewish people. The Jewish institutions and cultural life were ceased in the big cities of the Soviet Union and visitors to the remaining synagogues were closely surveyed by the KGB, the Intelligence agency of the Soviet Union. (Remennick 2009: 52) In the spring of 1970, the Soviet Union sought an opportunity to crush the campaign for Jewish emigration. In December 1969 three Soviet-Jewish activists, Mark Dymshits, Edward Kuznetsov and Sylva Zalmanson, decided to hijack a Soviet airliner, thereby calling attention to the emigration campaign. They intended to seize the airplane before takeoff and force the crew to fly to Stockholm,

from where the three of them would proceed to Israel. The problem was that the KGB, the Soviet intelligence service, arrested them before takeoff, subsequently followed by the arrest of 232 Jews in other cities. (Bloomberg 2004: 26)

The Soviet crackdown on Jewish emigration movement started with a wave of arrests of Jewish people in many Soviet cities- Leningrad, Kishinev and Riga in June 1970 followed by the planned hijacking of a Soviet airplane at Leningrad's Smolny airport. The first court trial of these arrested people took place in December 1970 in Leningrad, in which two of the twelve accused of planned airplane hijacking were found guilty and sentenced to death. A fresh series of court trials of Jewish activists, including who had applied for emigration from the country, happened in Leningrad, Riga, Odessa and Kishinev between January 1971 and June 1971. In the second Leningrad trial, one of the nine defendants was sentenced up to ten years in a strict-regime labor colony. And the other accused received imprisonment between one and seven years. (Bayer 1973: 210)

The crush of the Jewish emigration movement by arresting and trails of Jewish people outraged the other parts of the world. The Soviets should have prosecuted the offenders for aerial hijacking, which was a crime everywhere, but they chose to crush the entire emigration movement, equating it with "treason and betrayal of the fatherland" and "anti-soviet activity." The prosecutor asked for the death penalty for the defendants, although there had been no actual hijacking. News of the convictions outraged the rest parts of the world. The governments of 24 nations intervened on behalf of the defendants. The pope, protestant religious leaders, noble prize laureates, and others protested against these convictions. Six days after the trial, the supreme court of the Russian Federal Republic commuted the death sentences to life imprisonment. (Bloomberg 2004: 27)

In the year of 1971-72, tens of thousands of Jews applied for emigration visas. The Jews of Moscow city were in contact with members of the foreign diplomatic corps and with foreign journalists and tourists and many of them were Jews. When Moscow Jews denied visas, engaged in public demonstrations in the streets, hunger strikes in jail, sit-down strikes in government offices, and they spread the messages worldwide through their foreign contacts. In fact, from January 1968 to mid-1973 no fewer than 62000 Jews

left the Soviet Union, most left the Soviet republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. (Bloomberg 2004: 27)

Under the rising pressure from the Western countries, the Soviet authorities allowed some 13,000 Jews to leave for Israel in 1971, and 32,000 in 1972, this was the large number in compare to the total of 5,675 Jews who had been permitted to leave for Israel in the preceding four years. The Soviet government had raised visa fee very high, approximately \$1,100 to restrain the emigration of Jews. Applicants were also disquiet by delay, harassment, hostile interrogation, and social-economic sanctions. The most painful requirement for emigration was a character reference *harakteristika* from the employer, housing superintendent and others. Those asking for such reference were at once exposed to mistreatment, hounding, and humiliation by fellow employees and neighbors, and often they lose their jobs and faced expulsion from schools and other institutions. (Bayer 1973: 221)

The questions arise, ‘why were so many Jews being allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union during most of the time of Brezhnev leadership? Because Soviet Union under Brezhnev leadership going ahead with détente policy with the US as he wanted to please the US by allowing the emigration of the Jewish people. Leonid Brezhnev was also trying to get access to the US technology. The Brezhnev leadership was seeking to be accorded MFN (Most Favored Nation) status which US provided to its closest partners in trade. The eligibility to qualify as a MFN status meant that goods produced in the Soviet Union could be imported into the US without high tariffs. It also meant that increased commercial credits would be offered by the US. Clearly it was in the interest of the Soviet Union to enjoy such privileges. (Bloomberg 2004: 27)

Henry Jackson, a US Senator and strong supporter of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, introduced a legislation that linked trade privileges sought by the Soviet Union with an easing of emigration restrictions. He outlined above legislation at an emergency conference convened by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry on September 26, 1972 in Washington, D.C. The proposed amendment related to the East-West Trade Act that barred communist countries from having most-favored-nation (MFN) status unless they prevent their citizens to emigrate from the country, or imposed

more than a nominal tax on emigration. (Bayer 1973: 222) The idea behind this legislation, famously known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment, was to link most-favored-nation status to emigration policy. After two years of negotiation, an agreement was signed between Soviet Union and the US in October 1975, as per the Soviet Union agreed to allow the emigration of not less than 60,000 applicants per year. The Soviet Union, however, did not take advantage of the most-favored-nation rights. Moreover, so bitter about the Jackson-Vanik amendment that between 1975 and 1983, the total number of Jews permitted to leave Russia was only 150,000. (Bloomberg 2004: 27)

Russian Jewish emigration in the Post-Cold War period

The dramatic political and economic changes in the country led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Changes have been especially dramatic for the Jewish aspirants who wanted to emigrate from the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Gorbachev's policies of "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" and subsequent fall of communism in the Soviet republics triggered a mass emigration among Jews since the end of 1988, and in the intervening period more than 700,000 Jews have left the Former Soviet Union. (Trier: 34)

The second wave of mass Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union/Russia and Former Soviet Republics to Israel began at the end of 1989 and carried on throughout the 1990s. These emigrants consisted of nearly 50,000 from the Asian republics and 770,000 from the European republics. The vast majority of emigrants were from urban areas, with almost half of the emigrants during the period of 1989 to 1993 were from Moscow and St. Petersburg alone. (Nahmias 2004: 84) From 1989 to 1997, more than 700,000 Russian Jews immigrated to Israel, consisting nearly eighty-five percent of the total number of immigrants entered in the country during this period. The immigration of Soviet/Russian Jews led to the increase of 15% populations in Israel's demography, representing the largest ever immigration to the state from any one country. The majority of Russian immigrants were Jewish, although patterns of mixed marriages in Russia meant that approximately 30% of Russian immigrants may have been of non-Jewish background. Russian immigrants are ethnically Jewish and share the same religion as the majority of Israelis. Russian immigrants were granted the same social and citizenship rights as members of the Israeli host majority. (Bourhis et al. 2004: 120)

The Israeli Law of Return grants every Jews the right to immigrate to Israel; and the citizenship Law of Israel gives every such ‘immigrant’ automatic citizenship upon arrival. The term “Jews” was not defined when the law was adopted in 1950 which ultimately flame up controversies to its meaning in this context. In 1970, under the intense pressure from religious parties, Israeli government amended the law by introducing a restrictive definition, based on Jewish religious law. According to Jewish religious law, a Jew is a child of a Jewish mother or a person who has converted to Judaism. However, many non-Jewish people attached with Jews by family ties such as children of a Jewish parent, grandchildren of a Jewish grandparent, spouses of Jews as well as their spouses were given the same rights as Jewish immigrants. Due to prevalent phenomenon of intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews in many countries, many people among the immigrants to Israel not considered Jewish under the halacha (Jewish religious law). (Yakobson 2010: 218-219)

At the time of beginning of disintegration processes of the Soviet Union, Israel's population was less than five million. The Russian-speaking immigrants who entered in Israel after 1989 added almost one million to that number, and changed the demographic situation of Israel and West Asia as whole. Large number of Russian-speaking immigrants settled in the southern coastal city of Ashdod added more than hundred percent populations in size within a decade. After the influx of Russian-speaking immigrants in Ashdod city, it became Israel's fifth-largest city, with a population of more than 200,000. Israel now has the world's third-largest Russian-speaking community (outside the former Soviet Union), after the US and Germany. (Philip Reeves 2013)

In the 1990s, nearly 956,000 immigrants entered into the State of Israel. Of these, 824,000 were from the former Soviet Union and 40,000 from Ethiopia. These immigrants constitute nearly fourteen percent of the total Israeli population at the end of the decade. This massive immigration presented some challenges to Israeli government and society i.e. cultural diversity of the immigrants and large number of immigrants without the potential for self-support and cultural transition among these new immigrants. In order to meet these challenges, Israel adopted new immigration policy that differed from previous ones. First, the Israeli government changed the absorption processes of new immigrants.

The Israeli government shifted the initial absorption of immigrants in absorption centers to their direct integration into the community through their rental or purchase of apartments on the open market with government financial assistance. This provision was brought to deal with the increasing number of immigrants, but this arrangement was not feasible for all groups such as the Ethiopian community or those from poor economic background. Second, the Israeli government emphasized to promote cross-cultural understanding, particularly between professionals and the immigrant community through extensive and innovative training programs. Third, there were highly successful efforts during the first years to mobilize volunteer efforts within the general population one-on-one relationships. There was also a particular emphasis on the mobilization of all sectors of Israeli society to address the challenges (e.g. business sector, universities, kibbutzim). Fourth, there was shift from a policy of separate services for immigrants to integrated services that are sensitive to the needs and the cultural background of immigrants. (Habib et. al. 2003: 144-145)

The patterns of emigration of Russian Jews since 1989 have largely been driven by the nationality composition of those migrants. The three main countries were favorite destination for Russian Jews to emigrate. The most preferable country to Russian Jews was Germany, which accounted for 57 percent destination for Russian Jews; second preferable destination for Russian Jews was Israel that accounted for 26 percent; and the third major destination was the US that accounted for 11 percent emigration of Russian Jews. Since 1992, the share of total emigrants to the US has remained unchanged between 10-13 percent. But the relative share and number of total Russian emigrants to Israel and Germany have changed due to the changing circumstances in Russia and changing policies in the destination countries. Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, nearly half of the Soviet emigrants went to Israel (at least as their first destination). But since 1992, nearly 50-70 percent of those emigrating people went to Germany and Israel's shares went down, which accounted for about 20 percent only. (Heleniak: 535) Nearly one million Russian-speaking communities immigrated to Israel since 1989. The majority of them arrived between 1989 and 1995. The Russian immigrants were noted as a high human capital with a large proportion had higher

education degrees and were highly qualified in technical and professional fields. These people had resided in the European part of the Soviet Union. (Philippov 2010: 3)

The 1990s wave of Russian emigration was basically economic-driven migration. The Russian people left the USSR when its disintegration process had already been started and its economy was on the way to decline. They left the country with hopes of better economic condition in destination countries and ensure the better future for their next generations. A large number of these immigrants wanted to go to the US, but the US restriction policy on immigration forced them to go to Israel. (Philippov 2010: 3) The major shares of emigrating persons went to Germany because of their German roots and attractive resettlement package for *ausiedler* and strong pull of German economy. The second largest group of emigrants was Russians, accounted 36 percent during the period of 1995-1999 (26 percent in 1989-1995). Since Russians do not have homeland outside the Soviet Union, the destination choices of Russians emigrants were dispersed. Nearly half of them (51.1 percent) went to Germany and less than a quarter (22.9 percent) chose their destination as Israel, fifteen percent of them went to US and eleven percent went to other countries. The Jews accounted for only 13 percent of total emigrants from Russia and they chose different countries as their destination: 54 percent of them went to Israel and 23 percent of them chose to go to the US and 21 percent preferred to go to Germany. As a result of this massive emigration, the Jews population in Russia had declined by 43 percent and German population declined by 49 percent between 1989 and 1999. Consequently, the large number of highly skilled persons left the country. The Jewish people were made up disproportionate shares of the country's scientists, teachers, engineers, physicians, and production and technical managers. Those emigrated from Russia, 21 percent had hold a higher education, against 13.3 percent for the country as a whole. Of those who immigrated to Israel, 30 percent have had a higher education degree. The "brain drain" pattern is consistent with migration theory. One of the major challenges for Russia to retain these segments of society for play a role in the transition phase. (Heleniak: 535)

By 1996, Russian immigrants in Israel had achieved high rates of employment. However, less than half of them found appropriate jobs that fully comply with their

previous education and skills. The Russian immigrants were very educated and place a high value on education. Although there were many successful Russian immigrant students, there was also a high rate of high-school dropouts and a higher rate of deviant behavior than in the general Israeli population. Thus as with employment, the full potential of the immigrants was not realized and there was considerable disappointment on their part. Actually the major reason that forced Russian immigrants for coming to Israel was their concern for the future of their children, which makes the educational achievement of their children all the more important. (Habib et. al. 2003: 145-146)

Social and cultural integration of Russian Jews in Israel

The concept of integration emerged in modern migration discourse to replace the traditional assimilation perspective in research on first-generation migrants. The term 'integration' generally refers to instrumental adaptation to the host society while retaining its own ethno-cultural core identity. Their core identities allow migrants to develop bicultural-bilingual identity and lifestyle over time, combining features of their home and host cultures. The pace of integration is also determined by the attitudes and policies adopted by the host society towards immigrants that can be result in consensus, tension or conflict. In response to exclusion and discrimination, immigrant communities may develop the reactive ethnicity syndrome, refusing to integrate even at the cost of marginalization and lost opportunities for upward social mobility. (Remennick 2003: 39)

The old migration theorists connoted that integration should and probably would accelerate in the second generation, while the third and subsequent generations would in all likelihood reach a state of total assimilation i.e. dissolution in the host country's majority. However, this traditional linear model of assimilation has recently been challenged by new trends that have emerged as paradoxes of globalization. Recent trends show that increased migration accompanied by a revival of ethnicity and fortification of transnational ethnic Diasporas. Contrary to the past forecasts, second and third generation immigrants often reclaim their ethnic roots and reestablish social and economic links with their homelands. Reflecting this reality, some social scientists envisioned a new multicultural society emerging on the intersection of the global and the local, with a

mosaic of ethnic languages and lifestyles preserved in some fashion. (Remennick 2003: 40)

The host societies vary significantly in terms of their behaviors and attitudes towards the integration of new immigrants. It is very much decided by the pressure exerted by the host majority groups on the immigrant people. Therefore, integration ideology (whether it is assimilative or pluralistic) is one of the most important factors that influence the nature of the immigrants' adaptation process to the host societies. (Elias 2008: 15) With regard to Russian immigrants to Israel, three factors account for the integration of Russian immigrants in the Israeli society: government policies, climate of opinion, and the immigrant's ability to organize them.

First, the Israeli government has made policies to encourage assimilation of the immigrants into the Israeli society. The Law of Return (1950) serves as the legal basis for the immigrant absorption into the State of Israel. This law entitles every Jews to immigrate to Israel. The law initially failed to define the Jewish people which ultimately resulted in the public dispute. In 1970, the Israeli government amended the law, added a definition of "Jews" coinciding with that of Jewish law. As per this definition, a Jew is anyone who was born to a Jewish mother or who converted to Judaism. In an attempt to solve the problem of Soviet/Russian immigrants who had married to non-Jewish, the amended law also extended to include non-Jewish children and grandchildren of Jews and the spouses of these children and grandchildren. Therefore, nearly 30 percent 'Russian immigrants' arrived in Israel in the late 1990s were considered to be non-Jews and many of them were also not covered by the Law of Return. They were also not eligible to obtain Israeli citizenship and full immigrant benefits. (Horowitz 2005: 117-119)

Due to the diversity of the immigrants, the Israeli government changed the absorption policies of the State in the 1990s. Like other immigration-intensive countries, such as the US, Canada and Australia, the State of Israel took decisive steps to transform the country in favor of cultural pluralism rather than immigrant fully assimilation in the host dominant culture. The ideology of cultural pluralism recognizes cultural differences among the immigrants and allows for their preservation. Consequently, Russian

immigrants were then treated with greater tolerance for their cultural and organizational demands and were even granted public resources for their fulfillment. Some notable achievements in this respect are the matriculation exams in the Russian language, bilingual Gesher Theater, high school courses in Russian as a second language, and the Russian-language media funded by various government agencies. (Elias 2008: 15-16)

The transition from assimilationist orientation to cultural pluralism is also reflected in the status of the Hebrew language in immigrants' integration. In the first forty years, Israel implemented a monolingual policy, attempting to build a nation in which the Hebrew language was at the core of the Zionist movement. Instructions for new immigrants were written in Hebrew language and immigration authorities urged immigrants to change their names to Hebrew ones. Recognition of other languages was limited to fifteen-minute radio programs for each immigrant language and a limited number of foreign-language newspapers, most of which represent the ruling political party. In this regard, the significant changes began to appear in the 1970s and continued throughout the 1990s. In the 1990s, the government authorities started publishing information booklets in Russian language and the state-sponsored radio network *Kol Israel* (Voice of Israel) established a radio station in Russian language. The Israeli television channels started programs in Russian language and the print media such as magazines and newspapers, even some of them supported by the government agencies, began to appear in the market. Furthermore, as a nation of immigrants, the Israeli society accepts multi-ethnicity and tolerates a variety of accents and intonations. (Elias 2008: 16-17) Nevertheless, the 'Ulpan' (Hebrew language school) is still the most important tool for the cultural integration of immigrants. In addition to teaching the Hebrew language, it also teaches the norms and values of Israeli society and Jewish history. Earlier it was assumed that cultural integration was no less important than housing and employment, however, in the recent years the concept of cultural integration has been given lower priority. (Horowitz 2005: 121)

The Russian-speaking community in Israel availed full citizens' rights and other benefits as returning Diaspora. On arrival, they are entitled to get financial aids, right to vote, free Hebrew-language courses and professional training, and the right to

unemployment compensation and social security stipends. Moreover, the new immigrants to Israel are entitled to receive financial assistance for the period of six months to cover living expenses and rent. (Elias 2008: 17) Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the immigrants' integration issue had been one of the main government concerns. Until 1980s, a centralized absorption model was existed in Israel. When the first wave of mass Soviet immigrants entered in Israel in 1970s, these new immigrants placed in "absorption centers" for the period of six months, enabling them to adjust in the new society gradually. This centralized policy was changed in the early 1990s as the government advocated market forces to act. The free market ideology has been implemented through two major mechanisms: 'direct absorption' and 'absorption basket.' According to direct absorption model, the immigrants drove to their new homes directly from the airport without first living in a transitional absorption centers. In this free market model, the immigrants have the right to choose the city in which they wished to reside. The absorption basket is a package of services, allowances and entitlements that the immigrants use as they choose. (Elias 2008: 18; Horowitz 2005: 121) Hence, the dispersion of immigrants generated difficulties for absorption authorities to arrange regular Hebrew-language study programs and other activities for new immigrants. (Elias 2008: 18)

The second factor that dominates the integration progress of the Russian immigrants in Israeli society is the climate of opinion. In Israel the 'absorption' of new immigrants is the *raison d'être* of the state- a country that receive Jews from all over the world and turns them into one nation. The native Israelis openness behavior towards new immigrants and their willingness to accommodate them into the host societies helped into the social incorporation of the new immigrants. In contrast, the lack of "host receptivity" towards new immigrants e.g. closeness, indifference, rejection and hostility on part of native people prevent the development of close relationship between local residents and new immigrant, exacerbates the social isolation of new immigrants. In a study conducted by al-Haj and Lesham in 1999, Horowitz states that nearly 40-75% of native Israelis expressed their willingness to lower their standard of living for the sake of social incorporation of the new immigrants. Only 4 percent native Israelis opposed to stay together with the Russian immigrants. In poor-hit areas, the local residents showed great

generosity towards Russian immigrants who settled in their areas. (Elias 2008: 18; Horowitz 2005: 122)

The favorable character of the native Israelis began to erode by 1991, just two years after the beginning of second mass immigration of the Russian-speaking community. The native Israelis perceived Russian immigrants as a social problem. In a survey done in 1994, 25% of local residents expressed unwillingness to stay with new Russian immigrants. The teenagers and children also showed intolerance towards new Russian immigrants. When asked for their negative attitudes to Russian immigrants, the native people argued that the Russians did not want to integrate in accordance with the norms and values of the Israeli society. In addition, the immigrants from Islamic countries (known as Mizrachim), who had just stepped up their social mobility, blamed that they were threatened by the new Russian immigrants who were more educated and professionally skilled. The Israeli Arabs also expressed their anxieties about losing their jobs due to the influx of Russian immigrants. They also feared that the larger number of Russian-speaking people would inevitably influence the political decision of the country. (Elias 2008: 19; Horowitz 2005: 122-123)

Using the above mentioned study Horowitz states that nearly 40-75% native Israelis replied that the FSU immigrants have a positive impact on the country's economy, culture, security and scientific development. More than half of the local residents recognized their contribution in the development of economy and culture. However, Israeli Arabs were less positive than the Israeli Jews about the FSU immigrants' contribution to the Israeli society; only 11-24% Israeli Arabs considered that FSU immigrants' have contributed for the country's economic, cultural and scientific development. (Horowitz 2005: 123)

The third factor that dominates the immigrants' integration processes into the host societies is the ability of immigrants' community to organize itself, sometimes pushing towards the segregation of the community. (Horowitz 2005: 117) The numerical size of the immigrants is one of the main factors that decide their geographical dispersion in the host societies. The smaller in the number would wider their geographical dispersion, and the larger in the number would have greater chances of assimilation. (Smootha 2008: 2)

Unlike other immigrant groups to the State of Israel, the Russian-speaking immigrants succeeded in organizing themselves as a community. Dozens of Russian voluntary associations were become active in the mid-1990s. Some of them were self-help groups for old-age people, single-parent families and people with health problems. Some other organizations were cultural that tried to bridge the gap between Israeli and Russian culture or to spread Russian culture. There were also sports and entertainment organizations. There were some organizations that were functioning as a lobby for political and economic causes. The well-known organization was the Soviet Jewry Zionist Forum (SJZF), established in 1988 by a group of immigrant activists and former prisoners of Zion. Within the period of five years since its establishment, the SJZF transformed itself from an organization functioning on a limited administrative level to a bureaucracy with control mechanisms; from a small-scale voluntary association to a powerful organization that could mobilize thousands of immigrants for demonstrations; from an organization assisting small businesses to an initiator of economic projects. In 1995, the SJZF had 42 constituent organizations representing 60,000 members. (Horowitz 2005: 124)

Cultural Segregation

The State of Israel has experienced two waves of mass immigration since its establishment: one in the 1950s and another in the 1990s. In each wave, nearly one million new immigrants entered in the country. In the first post-State wave of mass Jewish immigration, approximately half of the immigrants came from Europe-America (Ashkenazim) and rest half of the immigrants came from Asia-Africa (Mizrahim, Sephardim). And in the later wave of mass immigration, occurred in 1990s, more than 90 percent immigrants came from the European parts of the Former Soviet Union (Ashkenazim) and the rest 10 percent immigrants came from the Asiatic parts of the FSU, Ethiopia and other non-Western countries. Although half of the immigrants in the 1950s were Ashkenazim, these European Jews were not considered to be problematic by the native Israelis or old-timers, of whom 77% were itself Ashkenazim. For this reason the immigrants of the first post-state mass wave, occurred in 1950s are reckon as Mizrahi and

who contrasted with the Russian immigrants (Ashkenazim) of the 1990s. (Smootha 2008: 1)

The Russian-speaking community in Israel arrived mainly in two large waves. The first wave of Soviet Jewish emigration took place in the 1970s, when Soviet leader Brezhnev allowed the emigration of Soviet Jews at the rate of 50,000 per year to reach as high as possible. And the second wave of mass emigration from the former Soviet Union/Russia occurred in the 1990s, which began shortly before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and continues to this day. In the 1990s, nearly one million Russian-speaking people from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrated to Israel, where they have joined nearly 200,000 Russian-speaking Jews who had immigrated during the 1970s and early 1980s. Despite the long time interval between the two waves of Soviet immigration, these Russian-speaking communities in Israel integrated to each other on a cultural level. They collectively take part in the cultural programs, professional activities, and the political parties. Moreover, both groups also maintain a link to current Russian culture. Earlier the Soviet people, who immigrated to Israel in the 1970s, were avoiding taking part in the Russian-language activities; now they have begun to take part in it. And the newer immigrants who arrived in Israel in the 1990s have joined established institutions such as the Russian-language press, which was founded in the 1970s. The Russian-speaking population of the Israel constitutes the one-sixth of total Israeli population today. These Russian Jewish immigrants use Russian language as principal language in their day-to-day life, and promote Russian language in journalism, commerce and culture. These people have created Russian-speaking world within Israel. These Russian-speaking Israelis live like in a cultural bubble that allows outside influences to enter, but does not enable them to participate actively in the cultural life of the country where they have settled. (Isakova 1999: 93-96)

The Russian-speaking immigrants may assimilate culturally and socially with the host societies, but they may also evolve as a separate ethnic group gradually. (Smootha 2008: 1) The 1990s wave of mass Russian immigration to Israel brought great changes in the Israeli society. Nearly one million Russian-speaking people from Russia and former Soviet Republics have immigrated to Israel and they formed the so-called 'Russian-

speaking community' as the largest Jewish ethnic group in the country. Since the influx of large number of Russian-speaking people and the formation of 'new identity' within the Israeli society have become a mutually painful issue for both- Russian immigrant and native Israeli. Actually the latter wave of immigration is greatly differs from the previous ones. This wave of immigration was neither Zionist nor traditionally Jewish. During their staying in the Former Soviet Union, they were strongly exposed to Russian culture and therefore they assert to continue their cultural identity. (Niznik 2005: 1703)

The process of forging a new identity is a complicated process, which has a number of practical manifestations. A national culture is based first and foremost on language, and national identification includes mastery of this language as a fundamental prerequisite. In this sense, the Russian language is the absolute basis of Russian culture, Russianness, and the most important tool of the individual's socialization in the Russian cultural tradition. This point is strongly supported by other scholars that "Linguistic behavior is one of the major factors in the definition of the social and cultural boundaries." Social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through the language. The old ethnic ties found their linguistic expression in loyalty to the language of origin and the new ethnic identities rely on linguistic symbols to establish new speech conventions. (Niznik 2005: 1703)

The literary activities of Russian-speaking people in Israel are also flourishing. The Russian-speaking community in Israel supports six major publishing houses and many independent publishers of individual works. The Russian-language bookstores can be seen in every Israeli city. Tel Aviv and Jerusalem has nearly twenty Russian-language bookstores in each and at least one Russian-language bookstore can be traced in every city of Israel. The several Russian-language lending libraries can also be seen as well. The activities organized under the auspices of the Jerusalem's Russian library are similar to Beit Ariela, Tel Aviv's main public library. Hundreds of volumes, including Jewish encyclopedia, have been written in Russian language since the first large wave of Soviet Jews immigration in the 1970s. Many academic textbooks, guidebooks and atlases have been translated and original literary works have also been published. The volume of

Russian-language cultural activity in Israel is far greater than most Israelis imaginations. (Isakova 1999: 95)

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dissident voices and non-Soviet culture has begun to dominant in Russia as well. The Russian-language culture has emerged as an empire, as a result of spread of Russian-speaking communities throughout the world. Today, a Russian writer in Israel can get publish his/her works in the original format of Russian language in the US, Germany, England, France, Cyprus and even in Australia as well. In 1997, Alexander Goldstein, a writer living in Tel Aviv, won the two most prestigious literary awards in Russia. Russian-language newspapers in Israel publish articles by Jewish and non-Jewish journalists who live in Russia and in the West as well. (Isakova 1999: 102)

An Israeli journalist Lily Galili has explained about the Russian immigrants in Israel in this way: Yet Russian immigrants are fully integrated into the Israeli society and are a big asset to the Israeli economy, many of them choose to remain culturally separate. Further she stated that “They meet with Israelis, they mingle with Israelis at workplaces, in the army, at school, at university. But after 7 p.m., there is some separation”. Through the internet services, satellite, and blog writings, they know everything that is going on in Russia. The Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel like to stay together and are fiercely proud of their rich Russian language. Some cities of Israel like Ashdod are flooded with Russian culture. There are many signs and name of the soap is in the Cyrillic alphabet. The men and women sitting in the cafes speak Russian language. The shops sell Russian items such as Russian-brewed Baltika beer, vodka, pickled herring and black bread etc. Many shopkeepers are also Russian-origin. (Reeves 2013)

The questions were also raised about the ‘Jewishness’ of those immigrants because the Israel’s Law of Return also allowed the immigration and citizenship rights to those people who had one Jewish grandparent. Under the rabbinical religious law, Jewishness passes through the maternal line. Due to this definition of Jewishness, more than 300,000 Russian immigrants in Israel characterized as non-Jews. Galili says that many new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union struggled with this as they have a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father which is not enough to prove themselves as Jews.

(Reeves 2013) There are no options of civil marriages in Israel. Those Russian-speaking Israelis described as non-Jews and wish to marry, they must have to go abroad, or convert to Judaism. Further Galili described that “They (Russian-speaking Israelis) find it offensive. They feel Jewish. They were raised Jewish. They have Jewish names. They once suffered for being Jewish in the Soviet Union. Now they suffer for being Russians in Israel”. (Reeves 2013)

Russian Diaspora as a factor in interaction between Russia and Israel

Israel is a small country, shaped by massive waves of immigration from more than seventy countries around the world. It is characterized by cultural diversity and many languages and mixed family patterns existing traditional and modern families side by side. Israel’s population is approximately 6,500,000, comprising of about 80 percent Jews and the rest 20 percent as non-Jews, primarily consists of Arabs (central bureau of statistics, 2001). It is a nation influenced by Western culture existing together with its traditional norms and values ranging from highly orthodox religious perspectives to secular ways of life. (Lavee et. al. 2003: 194)

Israel’s Jewish population is mainly consists of two main ethnic clusters: “Orientals” or *Sepharadim* (Spanish) and the *Ashkenazim*. The members of the Sepharadim group have been originated from the Near East, North Africa, Yemen, Ethiopia, the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, India, and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union. And the members of the second group, or the Ashkenazim, originated in the American or European continents. At present, 33.5% of the Jewish populations are Asian-African born or children of Asian-African origin; 40% are European-American born or children of American-European origin; and 26.5% were born in Israel or Israeli-born parents (central bureau of statistics, 2001). The Arab population itself is composed of several religious groups- primarily consists of Muslims (81.6%), Christians (9.4%), and Druze (8.7%). (Lavee et. al. 2003: 194-95)

The mass emigration from the former Soviet Republics to the State of Israel has formed a natural connection between Russian Federation (the successor state of the Soviet Union) and State of Israel. A special relationship exists between these two

countries, albeit of a different kind than to the Israel-US relationships. Russia's relations with Israel described to be pre-date establishment of State of Israel; extended from the origins of Zionist movement to the current role played by Russian-speaking community in Israeli politics, sciences, arts and technology. The Russian-speaking community in Israel is playing a significant role in the Israeli politics. The ethnic roots of all Prime Ministers (PM) of Israel, including the current one, Benjamin Netanyahu, can be found in Russia. During the 18th Knesset Assembly, four Soviet-born Russian-speakers held the ministerial post, including the foreign minister and tourism minister. (Rabkin 2012: 200) By using the political influence of Russian-speaking politicians, the State of Israel also worked to moderate the growing anti-Israel public opinion in the Russian Federation. (Rabkin 2012: 200-201)

The mass emigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) to the State of Israel has also changed the culture of both countries. These immigrants, who often hold multiple passports and maintain multiple languages and homes, make us re-think the meaning of homeland and exile. Upon arrival they transform themselves through new employment patterns, language, and other signs of cultural integration. In the process, they also transform their homes and host countries. (Gershenson 2011: 164) Naturally, such large number of emigration from the FSU must have an enormous impact on the diverse Jewish Diaspora groups remaining in the FSU. Approximately one and half million Jews still live in the former Soviet republics today, and almost all families' members or their relatives have left for Israel or any other countries. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the remaining Jews in Russia and other former Soviet Republics are involved in a process of redefining their ethnic and cultural identities. The emigrated Russian Jews and the remaining Jews in the post-communist Russia have led to the emergence of new diasporic forms and new ethno-religious identities, both amongst the emigrants and the "stay-behind" Jews groups. (Trier 2000: 34)

Another development that took place in the early 1990s is that Russian emigrants would no longer lose their Russian citizenship if they emigrate from the country. In a survey, the Israelis were asked whether Russian Jews should immigrate to Israel or stay in Russia and preserve their identity. The 16% respondents said that they should

immigrate to Israel; 42% of the participants replied that they should stay in Russia and preserve their identity; and 11% of them replied that they should assimilate. On the level of government policies, the Israeli government started to take interest in the Jewish life of Russia. The Israeli government assumed that all Russian Jews do not want to immigrate to Israel, either they fear that they would not find job there or they have become very old and they do not want to leave their families. Many Russian Jews who are deeply absorbed in the Russian social, cultural and economic life, they have also strong feelings for Israel and they are very keen to know about the country. Consequently, the Israeli government has opened centers and schools in Russia to promote Israeli and Jewish culture. The semi-governmental organizations are also involved in community development programs and care for the elderly. The result of this policy is that Russian Jews maintain their Russian identity as well as their Jewish and Israeli identity, and they are under no pressure to discard either one. (Horowitz 2005: 120)

On the other side, the Russian-speaking communities in Israel have drastically changed the Israeli educational system. A survey among the teachers showed that immigrant teachers are much more successful in guessing the expectations of the immigrant students than their Israeli colleagues. However, the immigrant teachers represent less than 5% of the actual teaching staff in compare to 12% of the potential labor force of immigrant educators. The lack of immigrant teachers' involvement in the Israeli educational system resulted in the downfall of the immigrant students. Among those who take the matriculation exams, the success ratio of immigrant students is much higher than that of their veteran Israeli peers in the 17-year old age cohort. However, higher percentages of immigrant students than their Israeli peers do not possess a matriculation certificate: 69% vs. 55%. The reason for this paradox is that dropout rates among the immigrant students are significantly higher than among the native Israeli students so that the participation rates of the immigrant students in junior-high education are significantly lower than their Israeli counterparts. (Epstein et. al. 2000: 192)

The dissatisfaction with the Israeli educational system and the higher unemployment rate among the Russian immigrant teachers motivated them to establish educational organizations. In this direction, the first attempt was made in 1992, when a

group of some immigrant teachers who had taught in the elite schools of Moscow and Leningrad opened a school for immigrant students in a rundown old school building in Tel Aviv. The school was named Mofet, a Hebrew acronym for ‘mathematics, physics, and culture’. The success of the Mofet School led to a series of activities organized by the group leaders. The immigrant teachers’ group became involved in the extracurricular activities in schools around the country and providing special classes for immigrant students who were facing difficulties at school. Initially, the Mofet activities were conducted in Russian language which later switched to Hebrew language. Initially, the Mofet Schools attracted mainly Russian-speaking students, later many native Israelis are also getting enroll in these classes. These schools are based on the methods and philosophy of Russian schools, which are subject-oriented rather than student-oriented and place heavy emphasis on the sciences. (Horowitz 2005: 125-126) Until 2000, the Mofet runs more than 20 supplementary evening schools around the country and five day-schools (the most famous of them is ‘Shevah-Mofet’ in Tel-Aviv, which has about 1300 students). And in 2005, the number increased to 140 classes in high schools and 200 classes in elementary schools around the country. The development of the Mofet system for the advancement of education is one of the most significant examples of the consolidation trends among the Russian-speaking intelligentsia in Israel. (Epstein et. al. 2000: 192; Horowitz 2005: 126)

Since 1990, the cultural changes also became apparent in the cinema of the both countries. In Israel, ‘Russians’ have become character in many Israeli films and TV serials. Even some of these characters have been created by immigrant filmmakers and actors themselves. And in Russian cinema, Jewish topics including Jewish emigration became more frequent. Today, as Russians became apparent in Israeli films frequently, Israeli topics also became apparent on Russian cinema commonly. Although these films (whether Russian or Israeli) have different production values and cultural significance, all of them have wide circulation in Russia and destination countries of the Russian Diaspora worldwide. (Gershenson 2011: 164-65)

Russians in the Israeli Cinema: The first time ‘Russians’ appeared in the Israeli cinema in the 1960 in the films of heroic-nationalist style, such as *They Were Ten*

directed by Baruch Diner. The characters of the film are heroic Zionist pioneers, presented as generic 'new Jews'. Although historically pioneers were Russian Jews, whose Zionist-socialist ideology was deeply influenced by their contemporary Russian culture and revolutionary movement, the film downplays its characters' Russianness. Even when Israeli cinemas moved away from the heroic-nationalist style, its cinematic Russians remained in the cultural centre. This trend became changed in the 1970s when the first wave of Russian Jews immigrants entered in Israel. The Russian characters became cultural 'others'. They were now presented as typical immigrants, who were struggling with a new language and culture, and finding hard to adjust themselves in the Israeli society. In the 1990s, Russian characters in the Israeli cinemas appeared more frequently. These films represent Russian immigrants as dangerous and abusive men, and beautiful, helpless, sexualized women. (Gershenson 2011: 165-166)

The Russian immigrants gradually started to break the trends in the Israeli film industry. They introduced the immigrant's point of view and added their own accented voices to the Israeli cinema. They formed a body of work which emerges in the contact zone between Russian-Jewish and Hebrew-Israeli cultures. Russian-Israeli films exist in a particular constellation of Zionist ideology, cultural policy and Russian-Jewish cultural identity. Unlike the Israeli films which are preoccupied with assimilation via inter-ethnic romance, the Russian-Israeli films rarely feature successful Russian-Israeli romance. (Gershenson 2011: 167)

Israel in Russian Cinemas: During the soviet period, any mention of Israel was nearly impossible in Russian cinemas. This trend became changed in the liberal era of *Perestroika*, when Jewish topics began to appear in Soviet cinemas. In the post-communist Russia, such topics become apparent frequently in Russian-Jewish cinema. A number of such films released dealt with the Russian emigration to the State of Israel both directly and indirectly. In contrast to Israeli cinema, the Russian cinema presented Russian emigration as a tragedy- a consequence of anti-Semitism or injustice against Russian Jewish people. (Gershenson 2011: 170)

Since the end of communist rule in Russia, Russian cinemas present not only Jewish emigration from Russia/Soviet Union but it also presented Russian immigrants

life in the State of Israel. This type of films was unimaginable during the communist rule in Russia. In contrast to Israeli movies, Russian films often present Russian immigration to Israel and immigrants' lifestyle in Israel as a mistake, whether comic or tragic. In the later films, the characters include visitors from Israel or return of Russian Diaspora. More recently, Russian movies and TV serials started to present Israel and Russian immigrants to Israel in a totally different manner, which is totally unrelated to Jewish topics. The Israeli scenes and location are being apparent on Russian screens. Therefore, Russian films and TV serials not only become a major tool for the advertisement of the Israeli tourist industry, but also as an introduction to Israeli society and mores. The most important thing is that these Russian TV shows are no longer related to Jewish topics. Israel appears in these TV serials just like any other foreign country, as any interesting place. This is of course a significant departure from the Soviet-era taboo or high-strung emigration tragedies of the 1990s. (Gershenson 2011: 171-172)

Role of Russian immigrants in Israeli Politics

Israel is a unique country among democracies in terms of political assimilation of the immigrants. These include two reasons- firstly, the Law of Return grants automatic citizenship to the ethnic immigrants and its electoral system allows the creation of immigrant political party. Secondly, nationwide proportional representation by party list with an electoral threshold of two percent allows minority representatives access to national politics. (Bagno et. al. 2010: 7)

There are relatively few democracies in the world that unconditionally grant political citizenship rights to ethnic immigrants e.g. Croatia, Romania, Germany, Latvia, and Poland. In contrast to other immigrants' societies, Israel provides immediate access to citizenship to all newcomers at the time of arrival to the country under the regulations of the Law of Return. This act, apart from having practical meaning, symbolizes the tie up between the host state and its ethnic immigrants. Moreover, a unique political opportunity structure allows immigrants to create their own political parties that immediately enter the national level politics. (Bagno et. al. 2010: 7)

Since the beginning of the large-scale Russian immigrations to the State of Israel in the 1990s, Israel's Russian-speaking community started to play a dominant role in the Israeli national politics. (Mazin 2006: 7) The right-wing politicians of the State of Israel were initially excited at the prospect of a large wave of Russian Jewish immigrations: first, they believed that Russian immigrants are coming from a communist society which was autocratic in nature; therefore they would incline towards rightward politically. Second, such immigrants were likely to be main opponent to the Arab-Israeli peace settlement than native Israelis. However, the right-wing politicians were disappointed, when the new Russian immigrants showed more interest in socio-economic improvement than in advancing the political prospects of the right-wing. (Sabella 1993)

The political preferences of the Russian-speaking community in Israel have changed over time. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, perhaps the most important elections in the history of the state because it brought us the Oslo Peace Accords, the Russian-speaking community divided into two parts. Those Russian immigrants who had become politically mature and who had already developed clear political understanding voted mainly for the right-wing and extreme right-wing parties. On the other hand, majority populations of the Russian immigrants voted for the Labor Party. The above elections were more of a social-welfare nature than a political one; it was a protest vote against the poor treatment of the Russian immigrants in its first two years. The Labor Party exploited the considerable frustration felt by the Russian immigrants and made extravagant promises to them in the area of housing and social welfare. However, the most promises made by the Labor party were unfulfilled during its tenure in the government office. (Mazin 2006: 9-10) In this election, a sectoral 'Russian' party- DA (a Hebrew acronym for 'Democracy and Immigration') headed by a well-known immigration activist Dr. Yuli Kosharovski, participated for the first time. However, the young party was sustaining lack of funds and its leader Kosharovski was also not perceived as a suitable representative of the Russian immigrants. In addition, the new Russian immigrants had also not become politically mature at that time. Consequently, most of the immigrants pinned their hopes on the large, veteran Labor Party. As a result, the DA Party failed to secure the minimum qualifying threshold needed to be elected to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and subsequently ceased to exist. (Mazin 2006: 10)

In the mid-1990s, Russian immigrants formed Political parties again, continued a long tradition of immigrant political organizations. In 1996, an ethnic parliamentary group “Gesher-National Social Movement” was formed, which later joined the right-wing Likud Party. From 1996 to 2003, a new immigrant party, Yisrael-be-Aliyah (IBA) headed by Natan Sharansky was present in the Knesset. The roots of the Russian immigrants’ parties was found in the Zionist Forum- an organization created in 1988 and dissolved in 2001. The committee of the Forum comprised 105 members. Initially, the Forum was presented as an apolitical body named by its founders as a “Ministry of Aliyah”, an alternative to the “Ministry of Absorption” which had difficulties adequately integrating immigrants into the Israeli labor market. The Forum, led by Natan Sharansky, served as the basis for the creation of Yisrael-be-Aliyah (IBA) political party. (Bagno et. al. 2010: 7-9) Yisrael b’Aliya was a sectoral party which exploited the feelings of the Russian immigrants and promised them to find solutions of their painful problems. The party in her campaign talked about the “dignity of the immigrants” and promised them to provide housing facility, social-welfare benefits, professional placement and so forth. The party also managed to rally numerous well-known immigrant figures around its banner, thereby fostering its image as a worthy representative of Russian immigrants. Among these figures were Yuli Edelstein, Marina Solodkin, Yuri Stern, Roman Bronfman, Michael Nudelman and others. (Mazin 2006: 11) In the parliamentary elections of May 1996, Yisrael-be-Aliyah managed to win seven seats in the Knesset. The stunning victory of Yisrael-be-Aliyah proved the fact that Russian immigrants had never been previously successful in forming a political party. The Yisrael-be-Aliyah aimed to create a modern and more democratic Israel that would attract more immigrants. (Emmons 1997: 350-351)

With the seven seats in the Knesset, Yisrael-be-Aliyah mobilized in favor of Benjamin Netanyahu to elect him as Israeli Prime Minister in 1996. Thus, Yisrael-be-Aliyah has had a substantial influence in the coalition government of Prime Minister Netanyahu. Yisrael-be-Aliyah leader Natan Sharansky noted that, “with seven seats in the Israeli parliament, the Russian-speaking immigrants now feel that they are more accepted as part of the Israeli decision-making process”. (Emmons 1997: 351) Throughout its existence, the Yisrael-be-Aliyah (IBA) party positioned itself as the party to address

social and economic problems faced by immigrants. In the general elections of 1996 and 1999, the party managed to win seven and six seats respectively. In the general elections of 2003 for sixteenth Knesset assembly, the party secured only two seats and dissolved within the Likud Party. Yisrael-be-Aliyah was gradually superseded by Yisrael Beiteinu (IB) headed by Avigdor Lieberman. While IBA was a minority party, the Yisrael Beiteinu party positioned itself as a national party in 2009. The Yisrael Beiteinu (IB) party set itself to represent broad interests rather than minority interests. Yisrael Beiteinu leaders Avigdor Lieberman, Michael Nudelman and Yuri Stem organized IB for the 1999 elections, winning votes from IBA among the nationalist and security oriented electorate. (Bagno et. al. 2010: 7-9)

In the next Knesset elections, held in May 1999, the Russian immigrant voters once again shifted over to the other side of the political map. Nearly half of the Russian immigrant voters voted for the Ehud Barak as Israel's Prime Minister (it should be recalled that this was the second time in Israel's history in which the prime minister was elected by a direct vote, separate from the vote for the Knesset). During this time, the Israel's border was relatively calm and Israel was undergoing peaceful settlement with the Arab countries. Ehud Barak exploited this period, characterized by a significant decrease in the terror attacks, and concentrated on the social and civil issues, such as the war on religious coercion, an increase in welfare payments and lower university fees. Barak's campaign among the Russian immigrant voters focused more attention on these issues than it did among the general Israeli population. The struggle against religious coercion, for example, was one that was very close to the hearts of the Russian immigrants and one that garnered Barak many votes (the new Shinui Party, which had split off from Meretz, focused on the same issues and achieved an impressive six Knesset seats). (Mazin 2006: 11-12)

The 1999 Knesset elections brought about far-reaching changes in Israel's sectoral politics. The positions of the Yisrael ba'Aliya Party before the elections appeared shaky since the party had failed to fulfill its election promises in the previous government. The party also engulfed in internal conflicts and gradually lost its trust among the public. The pre-election surveys predicted a defeat for the party, and Moti

Morel, a top campaigner was recruited to save the day. In his campaign, he demanded that the “Ministry of the Interior” should be removed from the ‘clutches’ of the Shas Party and handed over to the Yisrael b’Aliya. A noisy dispute broke out between Shas Party and Yisrael b’Aliya Party that resulted in the comeback of Russian immigrant voters who no longer wanted to vote for a ‘Russian’ sectoral party. Consequently, Yisrael b’Aliya lost only one Knesset seat in the election in compare to previous election and managed to hold six seats in the 15th Knesset. (Mazin 2006: 12)

However, the strength of the Russian community in the Knesset grew, following the appearance of yet another sectoral party- Yisrael Beiteinu (IB) headed by Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman had arrived in Israel as a young man from Moldavia in 1978, and after completing his education from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Hebrew University, he embarked on a brilliant political career. As a talented political functionary, he was appointed Director-General of the PM office during Netanyahu’s term as Prime Minister. After the elections, Lieberman left the Likud party and established his own party. He managed to recruit two prominent Knesset members from Yisrael b’Aliya namely Yuri Stern and Michael Nudelman for his party. Unlike Yisrael b’Aliya, the Yisrael Beiteinu cleared its agenda regarding the Israeli foreign policy. Consequently it received the votes of those immigrants who preferred to vote not only for an immigrants’ party, but also for one that had a clear cut approach to the country’s foreign policy. The young party secured to win four Knesset seats, a significant achievement. The Yisrael b’Aliya party suffered another blow when two of its Knesset members- Roman Bronfman and Alexander Zinker split off the party and formed an independent party known as “Democratic Choice”. The “Democratic Choice” party positioned itself as left-centrist, unlike the right-centrist position of Yisrael b’Aliya and the rightist stance of Yisrael Beiteinu, and offered a civil and social welfare agenda. (Mazin 2006: 13)

The experts have given several reasons behind the successful formation of immigrants’ parties or immigrants’ leaning towards the right-nationalist parties in Israel. First, the experts say that FSU immigrants were very vulnerable to ideological manipulation and this vulnerability has been successfully exploited by the right-wing parties. Second, the Al Aqsa Intifada or Arab uprising in 2000 seems to have affected

mainly FSU immigrants that promptly pursued them to support right-wing agenda. Third, the FSU immigrants are mostly secular. They tend to put priority on modernization and industrialization of the cities over the religious issues. In turn, they allied themselves with the secular forces, such as the right-wing nationalist Likud Party. In fact, the negative attitude towards Arabs is based on the post-immigration experience of the FSU immigrants. Thus, the Israeli government may change the FSU immigrants' political behavior by changing their experiences in Israel, which could, in turn, make the Israeli-Palestinian peace process likely to be successful. (Saleh: 2)

Russian immigrants' impact on Arab-Israeli conflicts

Today almost one million Russian-speaking people live in the State of Israel. These Russian-speaking immigrants comprise the single largest minority ethnic group in Israel. The presence of such large number of Russian-speaking people in Israel has significantly changed the political landscape of Israel and profoundly affects the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process. Their political position is staunchly right-wing and secular, and they become the main force who opposed the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. These people opposed the land concessions to the Palestinians and refuse to leave from the occupied territory. These people have proven to be even more aggressive than that of native Israelis or old timers. (Saleh: 1)

The mass immigration of Russian Jews to Israel has annoyed Arab Palestinians and they feel very suspicious about their future. It can be understand simply. The Arab people, who were living in Palestine since long time, have been displaced by the Israeli forces in 1948 and 1967 and their land has been seized by Israeli authority to facilitate new Jewish settlement. Now these Arab Palestinians are being pushed aside again for the settlement of new immigrants from post-Soviet Russia and other former Soviet Republics. Most Arab Palestinians are living as refugees in other Arab countries who left the country after the Israeli military actions. These Arabs now fear that the new Jewish immigration from Russia and other countries will end any chance of their ever returning to their homeland. As the new Jewish settlement taking place in the occupied territories, the Arab Palestinians living abroad losing hope of a Palestine state. And those Arab people living in the occupied territories fear that the mass immigration from the former

Soviet Republics would force them to leave the territory in the future. In January 1990, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir articulated his intention when he stated that "a big Israel is needed for the settlement of Soviet Jewish immigrants, no matter how often it is subsequently denied" reflected the true Israeli intention regarding the occupied territories. (Collins 1990) For this, the Shamir administration, according to Knesset members Haim Oron and David Zucker, invested \$1.3 billion to build up over 18,000 houses in the occupied territories between June 1990 and January 1992. The Shamir administration had planned to build up over 106,000 houses in the occupied territories of the West Bank to accommodate 400,000 immigrants in the next three to four years. (Sabella 1993: 39)

The immigration of Russian-speaking community to Israel and the question of settlement in the occupied territories are interlinked, resulting in the dispossession of Palestinians from their land and resources. By 1991, the State of Israel had confiscated nearly 65% of the West Bank and 50% of the Gaza Strip. Approximately 10% of the total Russian immigrants were directed to settle in the East Jerusalem Jewish neighborhoods that now encircle the Arab part of the city. From 1990 to mid-1993, nearly 8,500 housing units were allocated to the 'Greater Jerusalem' neighborhoods of Neve Ya'acov, Gilo and Pisgat Ze'ev in order to help the absorption of new immigrants. (Sabella 1993: 39)

The mass immigration from the former Soviet Republics (FSR) has clearly buttressed the Israel's policy of submerging the Arab part of Jerusalem. In the early 1990s, the demographic balance in East Jerusalem stood at 150,000 Palestinians and 120,000 Israelis. Moshe Amirav, Council member of Jerusalem City, has illustrated Israel's policy in the Jerusalem city. He pointed out that "since 1967, 70,000 apartments have been built for Jews, but only 5,000 for Arabs. Ten modern Jewish neighborhoods have been established, but not a single one for Arabs. Six neighborhoods have been rehabilitated by Project Renewal, but not a single in the Arab sector. Dozens of master plans have been approved for the Jewish sector in the last 23 years, not even one has been approved for the Arabs in the east and north of the city" (Sabella 1993: 39). The Israeli government had made less favorable policies for Arab people despite the fact that the

Arab population of Jerusalem city has increased by at least 70,000 inhabitants since June 1967. (Sabella 1993: 39)

On the one hand, the Israeli government has made strong effort to induce the immigration of Jewish people, living anywhere in the world to Israel. On the other hand, it has nearly blocked the return of ethnic Palestinians to Palestine. The reunification of separated Arab families has been held to a minimum. According to Yitzhak Rabin, the then Minister of Defense, between 1967 and 1987, a total of 88,429 applications were received from Arab Palestinians for return to their homeland, but only 13,509 applications were approved by Israeli authority. Since the beginning of the First Intifada in 1987, virtually no applications for ‘family reunification’ of Arab Palestinians have been entertained. In addition to this heartless separation of Arab families, the Israeli occupation authorities have also imposed conditions on travel permits issued to some Palestinians in the occupied territories. Due to the imposition of travel permits, the Arab Palestinians are fear to lose their residency rights on the return. Such type of treatment of the Palestinians is quite consistent with the policy of “population transfer” supported by some extremists such as Rabbi Meir Kahane and Rehavam Ze'evi. (Collins 1990)

The Russian-speaking community in Israel constitutes nearly twenty percent of Israeli population. They immigrated to Israel in two large waves: one in the 1970s and another in the 1990s. The Soviet Jews who immigrated in 1970s were easily assimilated to the Israeli society and do not possess serious challenges to it. The second large wave of Soviet immigration to Israel took place in the 1990s. The second wave of Soviet immigration started in 1989 when the disintegration process of Soviet Union had already been started and continued in the 1990s. The new immigrants were slightly different from the previous immigrants. These new immigrants were highly influenced by Russian culture and they liked to preserve their Russian identity. Some of the new immigrants are considered to be non-Jews because Israel’s revised ‘Law of Return’ also permitted the citizenship rights to those who born to Jewish parent, grandchildren of Jewish grandparent, and spouses of the Jewish people. However, these Russian immigrants are highly educated and hold professional degrees. Many of them are well-known engineers, doctors and technicians and they are giving their contribution for the development of the State of Israel. These Russian-speaking communities in Israel form a natural bridge

between Russia and Israel. They may contribute for the development of both countries. Although these Russian immigrants have established economic relationship between two countries-Russia and Israel, the cooperation level is very low. Both countries can utilize this natural link by making favorable policies.

Chapter V

Russia-Israel relations and External factors

While discussing the Russian-Israeli relationship, some other factors also needed to be taken into account. Some factors are obstacles in the development of full-fledged relationship between the two countries. Russia's relation with Iran and its support to the Iranian nuclear program is the serious concern for Israel. Israel has objected many times and raised its concern before the Russian leadership. While, Israel's close relations with United States are other main hindrances in the increasing relationship between Russia and Israel. In addition, the increasing influence of the Russian Federation in the domestic affairs of the Arab Countries, especially in the Syrian Crisis, is also posing as a major concern for Israel. These are some issues which are posing as a major obstacle in the development of friendly relations between Russia and Israel.

Israel's concern over Russia's support to Iranian Nuclear Program

The Iranian Republic is a non-Arab country in the West Asia region. Iran, like other Arab countries, even worse than that, is posing a major threat to the State of Israel. In October 2005, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad noted that "Israel should be wiped off the map". While addressing a conference titled The World without Zionism, Ahmadinejad stated that "Anybody who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation's fury, while any Islamic leader who recognizes the Zionist regime means he is acknowledging the surrender and defeat of the Islamic world" (MacAskill 2005). His speech was immediately criticized by the US, Germany, France, Britain and Israel. But Mr. Ahmadinejad rejected compromise and he, while recalling the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the supreme religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that "As the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map" (MacAskill 2005).

Iran's harsh attitude towards the State of Israel and Iranian efforts to develop a nuclear program has become a major concern for the Jewish State.

The State of Israel has expressed her concern over Iranian Nuclear program and asked the world community to prevent Iran from acquiring the nuclear weapons.

Iranian Nuclear Programme

The genesis of Iran's nuclear programme has embedded in mid 1950s. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was the ruler of Iran in 1956. He was inclined towards the United State of America. Mohammad Reza Shah and US authority had signed a nuclear deal in 1956. In the deal Iran agreed to acquire twenty nuclear reactors from US (Anand 2006: 1). After the agreement Iran received country's first, albeit modest, nuclear reactors from the US in the form of 5-megawatt thermal research reactor for the Amirabad Technical college in Tehran (Islam: 104). Iran was seeking for regional credibility in international arena. The Iran's nuclear programme came into existence to fulfill that purpose. Iran has been signed nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970 (Anand 2006: 1). In 1974, Iran had completed a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Islam: 104). And the same year, in 1974, Iran had also submitted a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly that called for establishing a Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone (NWFZ) in the West Asia (Kerr 2009: 1). The Shah government accelerated its ambitious nuclear program after the West Asia region witnessed a geopolitical developments in the early 1970s i.e. the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and the subsequent oil crisis. He established an Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in 1974, and subsequently announced an ambitious plan to build 23 nuclear power plants with the capacity of 23,000 Megawatt to generate nuclear energy within next 20 years. The US administration, together with German and French Companies, were heavily involved in Iranian nuclear program. They provided different components to Iran needed for the nuclear fuel cycling and even trained Iranian nuclear scientists. While the US, Germany and France was helping Iran to develop clean nuclear energy, the Shah regime of Iran was more interested in procuring the nuclear weapons. In September 1974, the Shah remarked that "the present world is confronted with a problem of some countries possessing nuclear weapons and some not. We are among those who do not possess nuclear weapons, so the friendship of a country such as the US with its arsenal of nuclear weapons.....is absolutely vital" (Islam: 105).

However, the Iranian nuclear programme initiated by the US, halted after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, which resulted in the overthrow of the Shah's regime. The newly formed Iranian government led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini showed little interest in the country's nuclear programme, resulted in the desertion of many Iran's top nuclear scientists from the country (Islam: 106). However, when Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and subsequently the failure of world powers, including the UN and the US, to punishing the Iraq for this outrage compelled Iran to develop country's nuclear program. Earlier Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini was against the country's nuclear ambitions and he insisted that Iran had no need for a nuclear program. The previous ruler Shah had spent billions of dollars on a Bushehr nuclear power plant because he was a "lackey of Western imperialists" (Milani 2007: 331).

Following the use of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iran, Iran expressed its desire to revitalize its abandoned nuclear program. But western countries- particularly Germany, due to the pressure from the US, did not show interest for the revitalizing of the Bushehr nuclear plant. (Milani 2007: 331) Nevertheless, in 1983, Iran announced a resumption of its nuclear program with the help of India and China. Iran signed agreements with Pakistan and China for long-term cooperation. Between 1990 and 1992, Iran had signed several agreements with China. (Islam: 106) Since mid-1980s, China became the significant sponsor for the procuring of Iranian civil nuclear programme. In 1990, China signed an agreement with Iran for the period of ten-year cooperation in civilian nuclear programme. As per the agreement, the Iranian nuclear scientists and technicians were trained in China (Anand 2006: 1). China had also supplied Iran with small research reactors, conversion technologies, laser enrichment equipment, and even supplied more than a ton of natural uranium to Iran (Islam: 106). The US administration under President George H. W. Bush was highly suspicious towards Iranian nuclear ambitions and it started to curtail the foreign assistance to the Iranian nuclear programme. In 1992, China was persuaded by the US to suspend its assistance to Iran. Due to the US pressure, China stopped providing assistance to the Iran's nuclear programme (Anand 2006: 1).

Although Iran had received development assistance from the Soviet Union and occasionally threatened to accept military assistance from the same to force greater concessions from the US, Iran remained a strong US ally during the major period of the Cold war era. As Iran was the member of the Baghdad Pact, its nuclear program was, partly, geared towards preventing the Soviet influence in the West Asia region. At that time Iran was sharing a long border with Soviet Union's southern territory and it feared Soviet invasion of its oilfields. In fact, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Carter administration of the US feared such a move into Iran (Islam: 105).

The newly formed Iranian government under Supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini severed country's alliance with the US and actively sought to redefine its national interest and international roles in opposition to the previous Shah government. The new Iranian government declared the US as an enemy of Islam and Iran. Khomeini also acknowledged that Islam is not compatible with communist ideology. It was the main reason that despite away from US, Iran did not come towards the Soviet Union for international support. These developments were enough for creating space to intervention in Iran by superpowers. Such fears of an invasion provided ammunition to the supporters of Iranian nuclear deterrent (Islam: 106).

During the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, the Soviet Union provided conventional weapons to Iraq, which increased the ability of Iraq to prolong its military efforts. The Soviet support to Iraq had also raised apprehension in Iran about Soviet Union's intentions. During the war, Iran attacked repeatedly against Iraq's Osirak reactor while Iraq attacked some seven times against Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr between 1984 and 1988. These developments were compelled Iran to launch a massive military restructuring and rearmament program (Islam: 106-107). In 1988 Iran had launched the Iranian military nuclear program subsequently the end of the Iran-Iraq war. The launched of Iranian military nuclear program had fulfilled its two fold aim, first to protect the republic from external aggression and second was to enabling Iran for spreading the rule of Islam in the West Asian region under the Shi'ite leadership in changing world order. This project was the most important attempt undertaken by Islamic Republic of Iran, and as the years went by it became detrimental to the regime's image. It is not surprising then

that the Ayatollah have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in it (Kuperwasser 2015: 9).

In the early 1990s, two significant international events affected Iranian national security. The first was the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, new states were emerged in the Central Asia and Caucasus that keeps Russia physically away from the Iranian border ultimately reduced the chances of an invasion into Iran. Ironically, the end of the threat of Soviet invasion simultaneously increased the threat from the US since Washington would not be deterred from intervening in Iran because its superpower rival- Soviet Union had faded from the region. The second event was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent Operation Desert Storm (1991) to freed Kuwait from Iraq, altered Iranian international perceptions. These events contributed to the new dimension of Iranian nuclear policy as well as towards the Russia-Iran relations (Islam: 107).

Russia and the Iranian Nuclear Programme

After Soviet dissolution, Russian federation came into existence. The successor Russian federation has regarded the maintenance of friendly relations with its neighboring countries. Russia maintained friendly relations with the former Soviet Republics and also tried to improve relations with other countries bordering with the former Soviet Union (FSU). Among these countries, Iran, as a major regional power in West Asia and also having a substantial influence in the Central Asia and Transcaucasia region, occupies an important position in the Russian foreign policy (Naumkin 1998).

In the post-cold war period, Russia actively develops political and economic relations with Iran. In the political terms, Iran can balance Russian relations with the West by developing friendly relations with Russia; it can restrain the emergence of other regional powers in the West Asia. Russia is also benefitted by developing good relations with Iran. Russia could neutralize possible attempts of Iran to dominate Central Asia (or at least some of its regions); Russia's friendly relations with Iran could allow Russia to retain and even to extend its influence in the West Asia region; it could also strengthen Russia's positions in the solution of the problem of the legal status of the Caspian Sea. In

the economic terms, Iran proved to be one of the main markets for Russian arms industry, including the machine-building industry. Iran is a very rich country in terms of oil resources, so Russia can work on the possibility of the creation of oil transportation routes through Iran. Both countries- Russia and Iran are littoral countries of the Caspian Sea and there are huge potential of cooperation between two nations for the development of their own and the whole region as well (Naumkin 1998).

During the major period of the cold war era, the Shah regime of Iran aligned itself closely with the US, formally joined CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) well known as Baghdad Pact. The Shah regime also hosted US military advisers and intelligence services (Trenin and Malashenko 2010: 19). The ideological conflict between Moscow and Tehran had begun in 1955, when Iran formally joined the anti-Soviet, pro-Western Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). The Soviet Union supported left-wing and even nationalist Iranians who opposed Western imperialism (Milani 2007: 329). Nevertheless, in the 1960s and 1970s, Iran's geopolitical and Geo-economic location attracted the Soviet Union to develop economic relations between the two countries. This relationship was the unique case in the framework of the Soviet Union's relations with the third world countries (Koolae 2008: 1). The chilled relationship between two countries ended only in 1965, when Iran signed a major economic deal with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, in return for Iranian gas, promised to build Iran a much-coveted steel mill. For Iranian ruler Shah, a steel mill was the most important symbol of progress and modernity. While the Western countries were not interested to build the steel mill, the Soviet Union was more eager to help with the project (Milani 2007: 329).

Soon after the signing of economic deal between Iran and the Soviet Union in 1965, Iran became the home of more than 8,000 Soviet advisers and technicians. The KGB, Soviet Intelligence Agency, station in Tehran was enlarged, not so much for espionage as for the security of the Soviet citizens who lived and worked in Iran (Milani 2007: 329-330). Although Iran was an US ally under the Shah regime, the Soviet Union and Iran maintained congenial relations, if not friendly relations, during most of his ruling period. In 1979, Islamic revolution (also known as Iranian revolution) occurred in Iran, which overthrown the existing Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi government of Iran.

The Pahlavi dynasty was exclusively supported by the US. Soviet Union hoped that the new Iranian government led by the revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the rise of anti-Americanism in Iran would lead to the close relationship between the Soviet Union and Iran. But Soviet assumption about Khomeini regime proved wrong. Khomeini was not only against USA but also he was not supporting to communism. Khomeini disagreement with USSR has seen visible during the Soviet occupation to Afghanistan. Soviet Union was supplying a bulk of weapons to Iraq by Afghanistan's territory during the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88. So it is hardly surprising that Khomeini viewed the Soviet Union as an enemy (Katz: 69).

The Soviet Union reacted with mixed feelings to the Iranian revolution of 1979. On the one hand, it was happy for the US strategic defeat in Iran, as well as the subsequent humiliation of the hostage crisis. While, on the other hand, Moscow was also suspicious over the revival of the Islamic influence in its southern territory. As Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev quoted in his speech in the Party Congress in 1981 that Islamic movements "could also be liberating." After a few years, the Soviet Union itself realized distressing experiences in Afghanistan. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), Iran gave shelter to Afghan refugees who fled from Afghanistan and also provided support to the anti-Soviet activities in its territory, especially in Herat province. However, the Soviet Union, in its part, remained formally neutral during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, but continued supplying arms and weapons to the Iraqi forces under the auspices of a 1971 friendship treaty (Trenin and Malashenko 2010: 19-20).

The Soviet-Iranian relationship improved sharply after the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and subsequently Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 coincided with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in the same year. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the end of communist rule in Russia in 1991 provided an opportunity to Iran for the opening of military cooperation. When German firms pulled out of Bushehr nuclear power plant project in 1990s, Iran turned to Russian Nuclear Power Ministry, Minatom for the buildup of nuclear power plant. The Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev started selling arms and weapons to Iran, and it also agreed to complete the nuclear reactor at Bushehr, which was being started by the West German

firm in the 1970s but ceased to work after the Iranian revolution that took place in 1979 (Katz: 70; Trenin and Malashenko 2010: 20).

However, Russian President Yeltsin was more interested to develop relations with the West, particularly with the US despite of serious differences between Washington and Moscow. In 1995, the then US Vice-President Al Gore and then Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin signed a secret agreement, known as Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement (named after the US vice-president and Russian Premier who signed it). In this agreement, the US agreed to drop objections to Russia's sale of sophisticated weapons to Iran and promised not to impose sanctions mandated by US law. Russia, in return, promised not to sale more weapons to Iran after December 31, 1999 (A Review of Gore-Chernomyrdin, 2000: 1). Russia also slowed down work on the Bushehr nuclear power project, whose completion, according to the US, would enable Iran produce nuclear weapons by recycling nuclear fuel (Katz: 70).

Under the Putin presidency, Russia had adopted more nationalistic foreign policy and an anti-US approach. In response to US refusal to abandon its ballistic missile defense plan, President Putin in November 2000 publicly repudiated the secret Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, signed in the year of 1995, and expressed his willingness to sale weapons to Iran. President Putin had also announced that Russia would resume work on the Bushehr nuclear power plant and it might even build more nuclear reactors in Iran (Katz: 71). In order to develop close relationship between two countries, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami paid visit to Russia in March 2001. Russian and Iranian officials together denied the US claims that Iran sought to develop nuclear weapons. Iranian government as well as Russian administration proclaimed that Iran is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and it is in full compliance with all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, so it has the right to develop nuclear reactor for civilian purpose. Russian administration further declared that the US concerns about Russian arms sales to Iran were misguided, as Iran was buying only defensive weapons from Russia to defuse any possible attacks on her. In an event, the spokesperson from both countries reiterated that Russia and Iran are sovereign nations,

and Washington had no right to tell them how they should conduct their bilateral relations (Katz: 71).

Iran's nuclear program is one of the most polarizing and burning issues in the contemporary world politics. The US, Russia, China and the European countries have been drawn into a heated debate among themselves and with Iran over its nuclear ambitions. The US and Russia, particularly, have had seen Iran's nuclear issue in different perspectives and have not been adopted appropriate and effective ways of dealing with the same. The US authorities have accused Iran of building nuclear weapons and ultimately creating disturbance in the West Asia region and the world as whole. The US administration has had imposed a variety of diplomatic and economic sanctions against Iran to pressurize it to turn down its ambitious nuclear programme. Russia, on the other hand, has traditionally objected to using force and economic sanctions for resolving the Iranian nuclear issues and continued insisting that Iranian nuclear aspirations were peaceful in nature (Omelicheva 2012: 331).

In the beginning of the 1990s, Russia formed a joint research organization with Iran called Persepolis which enabled Iran to import technical information from Russia and also sought the help of Russian nuclear experts. Iran, in turn, a self-proclaimed advocate of Muslim's rights, remained silent on Russia's military actions against Muslims in Chechnya. In January 1995, Moscow and Tehran signed an agreement to jointly construct the first unit of Bushehr nuclear power plant likely to be delivered at the end of 2002. The reactor was likely to become operational in 2004 (Islam: 107). The Bushehr nuclear power plant had been started by a German company, Siemens, but halted after sustained damage during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and subsequently US pressure on Germany to terminate the contract (Orlov and Vinnikov 2005: 50).

Iran and Russia had signed an agreement in August 1992 to develop friendly relationship. The agreement was inked by both for a long -term trade and economic cooperation, two countries also agreed on the construction of a nuclear plant in Iran for peaceful civilian purpose. The nuclear cooperation between two countries had included the construction of nuclear power plants in Iran, cycling nuclear fuel, Russia's export of research reactors to Iran, reprocessing the used nuclear fuel, producing isotopes for use in

scientific and medical research, and training to Iranian nuclear scientists at the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (MEPhI) (Orlov and Vinnikov 2005: 49-50). Initially Russia took interest in the Iranian nuclear program because it was needed foreign currency (Russia's economy was struck after the disintegration of the Soviet Union) and jobs for country's scientists and technicians (Milani 2007: 331). Since the mid- 1990s, Russia had featured in virtually every mention of Iranian nuclear program. In fact, Russia is the only country to have openly supported Iran's nuclear facilities. During the period Russian officials showed closeness with Iran due to its historic and stable partnership. However Russia became cautious after the Iran's nuclear intentions (Orlov and Vinnikov 2005: 50). Since the beginning of the Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran, Moscow made a distinction between what it regarded as legitimate nuclear cooperation and an alarmist securitization of Iran's nuclear program. Since the beginning of impasse over Iranian nuclear issue in 2002, Russian President Putin emphasized the Iranian right of procuring the nuclear program for civilian purpose (Pieper 2014: 19). In January 2001, Russia announced that the 90 percent work of Bushehr nuclear power plant has been completed and the operations would begin by 2003 (Anand 2006: 1).

The Russian Federation has also provided diplomatic support to the Iran over its nuclear programme. In 2002, Western countries reacted with warning alarm when some components of Iranian nuclear programme bring to notice that were undeclared to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The US administration quickly warned of serious military consequences to the Iranian nuclear program and persuades it to fully cooperate with the IAEA safeguards agreements. In the absence of direct diplomatic relations between Iran and the US, the Europeans engaged in diplomatic efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis. But the Europeans were unsuccessful in their efforts (Pieper 2014: 17). Due to the increasing pressure from the Western countries, Iran signed an additional protocol to its nuclear safeguards agreement with IAEA. According to additional protocol agreement, Iran is required to provide the IAEA officials an expanded investigation of its nuclear activities and greater access to its nuclear sites. The Iran is required to cooperate with the IAEA officials to verify Iran's claims as non-nuclear weapon state under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Over the preceding of eighteen months, Iran had come under the mounting international pressure to prove its motives

behind the undeclared work on uranium enrichment and plutonium separation- the two processes to produce the nuclear weapons-grade material. Consequently, the US and European's suspicions about Iranian nuclear ambitions have intensified and propelled them to look out the issue. However, the Iranian government, including the hard-line conservatives and moderate reformists, repeatedly emphasized that the country's nuclear program is purely for civilian purpose only (Bowen et. al. 2004: 257).

Due to the failure of the diplomatic efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis, the file was transferred to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2006. Russia along with China worked together for minimizing the pressure on Iran and watering down drafts of sanctions resolutions. China and Russia's policies in regards to Iran were different against the European countries. the matters regarding Iran opened for discussions in UNSC in 2006 and The format for negotiations were changed from European three - Germany, France, Great Britain (E3) to P5+1 (the five permanent members of UNSC plus Germany). But it was also evident that the Western countries could not reach a diplomatic solution without the support of Russia and China, and it soon became apparent that Russia along with China adopted different policies over Iran's nuclear crisis than those of the West. Other actors such as Turkey also joined the Iran diplomacy at later moments with attempts to mediate between the West and Iran. Turkey managed to secure the first Iranian agreement to a proposed nuclear deal in May 2010. In doing so, Turkey emphasized the policies and priorities that resembled the Russian and Chinese views more than the US-dominated Western camp's position at the time (Pieper 2014: 18).

The Iranian government has repeatedly declared that its nuclear program serves only civilian purpose and main priority behind possessing nuclear programme is generating electricity to meet future energy demands. Iran has outlined four main reasons for not relying on the country's fossil fuel reserves to achieve this end. These are (1) Iran will become a net importer of crude oil in the coming decades if country's fossil fuels continue to be used in the present form; (2) domestic use of energy resources will drastically affect Iran's foreign exchange earnings that comes from exporting of crude oil and natural gas; (3) heavily dependence on crude oil will have a serious environmental

concern; (4) fossil fuels are better used in petrochemical and other processing industries to generate greater added value (Memorandum from the Iran's Ambassador to the United Kingdom on Washington's propaganda attack, 2003).

Iran plans to produce 7000 Megawatt of nuclear energy by 2020, which will require at least seven nuclear power plants, including the 1000 Megawatt Bushehr nuclear plant, which has been built with Russian assistance (Bowen et. al. 2004: 258). In the projected 7000 MW scenario, Iran will approximately save 190 million barrels of crude oil annually which valued nearly \$5 billion per year. The environmental value will amount to preventing the release of over 157,000 tons of carbon dioxide, 1150 tons of suspending particles, 130 tons of sulfur and 50 tons of nitrous oxide into the atmosphere (Memorandum from the Iran's Ambassador to the United Kingdom on Washington's propaganda attack, 2003).

But the goal of achieving the production level of 7000 MW of nuclear energy by 2020 is not possible without the foreign assistance. Iran needs planning in various advanced fields of nuclear technology such as nuclear fuel cycle, nuclear safety and nuclear wastes. And the Russia is committed to provide nuclear fuel only for the Bushehr nuclear power plant and has not committed to provide nuclear fuel to other proposed nuclear power plants. Russia, even with respect to the Bushehr nuclear power plant, has committed only to provide nuclear fuel for a limited period of time. To fulfill its need, Iran has consistently sought assistance from Western countries and called for joint cooperation in the above-mentioned areas (Memorandum from the Iran's Ambassador to the United Kingdom on Washington's propaganda attack, 2003).

When seeking foreign assistance for its nuclear program, Iranian officials agreed for an increase in inspections of its nuclear facilities by the IAEA. Hasan Rowhani, the head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, announced that Iran has agreed to stepped-up inspections of its nuclear activities by the IAEA as it wanted to earn greater trust from the international community. He further stated that "Atomic weapons are not important to our defense doctrine." Russian President Putin and Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov expressed their satisfaction with Rowhani's statement and indicated that Russia would go further for lucrative nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran.

Russia had joined the US and other western countries in urging Iran to accept tighter inspections by the IAEA of its nuclear activities. But Russia refused to accept US proposal for freezing \$800 million deal with Iran, signed in 1995, to build Bushehr nuclear power plant. Russia dismissed the US concerns that Iran would use the project as a cover to develop nuclear weapons (Heintz 2003).

On March 28, 2017, ROSATOM, Russia's Atomic Energy Corporation, and Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on nuclear materials transportation in Moscow. The MoU was signed by Alexey Likhachev, Director General of ROSATOM, from Russian side, and Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs, from Iranian side. The memorandum was within the framework of the high level meeting between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The document envisages the creation and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure in Iran and Russia, including the licenses and permits for transportation of nuclear materials, as part of civilian nuclear cooperation between the two countries. The memorandum also emphasized that the involving parties would strictly comply with the international safety standards related to the nuclear material management (Iran's ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Israeli concern over Iranian Nuclear Program

The regional and international scenario has undergone far-reaching changes since Iran started to develop its nuclear program. Although all major players of the world realized the threat of Iranian nuclear program, they are still lacking on general agreement to work together against the Iranian nuclear threat. The western countries attribute such supreme importance to other interests, such as the war on terror, the uninterrupted supply of crude oil, relations with Russia, and maintaining the regional stability at minimal cost. The regional powers of the West Asia consider Iran as a central point of the radical Islamist ideology from where the radicalism spread to the other parts of the region and the world as well. They view Iran's nuclear program as a catalyst for it to increase its regional hegemony, and therefore as a direct threat to international security and stability. On the other hand, the international powers, including the US, consider Iran as a possible partner in the battle against Islamist ultra-extremism, and in the struggle to promote

regional stability and economic interests. The major differences between major international powers and regional powers have deepened regarding Iranian nuclear program against the background of regional instability in the West Asia and the relatively recent war against the Islamic State (IS) (Kuperwasser 2015: 16).

Although the strained relationship between Israel and Iran had begun since the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, but countries both have never engulfed in intense fight or military conflict. The two countries even have cooperated many times in the face of common regional threats, both before and after the Islamic revolution of Iran. Indeed, the absence of territorial disputes and traditionally different regional zones of interest (the Levant for Israel and the Persian Gulf for Iran) between two countries, the conflict is by no means inevitable between them. The Arab countries held suspicious attitudes towards both countries and consider them as a threat to regional stability (Kaye et. al. 2011: 1). However in the current regional environment, when Iran has stepped up anti-Israel stances and is asserting its interests in areas near Israel's northern border, both countries-Israel and Iran consider each other as a central security challenge. As Israel expressed its concern over Iranian nuclear programme and Iran's growing influence in the West Asia region, a direct military conflict between Iran and Israel may become more likely. Indeed, the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, also known as second Lebanon war, was widely perceived as a proxy war between Israel and Iran. This war might have a precursor of possibly more direct war between the two countries in the future (Kaye 2011: 1-2).

However, the Iranian officials have repeatedly claimed that the country's nuclear program is for only civilian purpose, the international communities widely consider it as ambitions to develop nuclear weapons. The western countries, particularly the US, want Iran to dismantle its nuclear program altogether, but Israel may be satisfied if Iran accepts tight international supervision to ensure that its nuclear program is for civilian purpose only and it stops enriching uranium to weapons grade. In January 2005, Meir Dagan, the head of Israel's intelligence agency Mossad, warned the Israel's Foreign ministry and Defense Committee that Iran's nuclear program has reached to the 'point of no return' where Iran would no longer need outside support to enrich uranium for use in nuclear

weapons. Shimon Peres, the then Israel's Deputy Prime Minister, also concluded that Iran is a "single-handedly world's most serious security threat". The US considers Iran as a greatest threat to regional stability in the West Asia, slightly different opinion from those of Israel (Mekelberg 2007: 2).

The major powers of the world are trying to seek diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program. The Iran is also cooperating with the major powers and international agencies i.e. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to find a peaceful solution of its nuclear program. The IAEA is investigating the Iran's past nuclear activities with potential military dimensions but has never detected any diversion by Iran. Iran is a signatory of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since 1970 and it has the right to pursue nuclear programme for civilian purpose. Iran has declared that its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes only and has been entirely peaceful. The Iran's supreme religious leader Ayatollah Khamenei made several religious and political statements since 2003, known as nuclear Fatwa, on the unacceptability of all weapons of mass destruction in Islamic law and behavior. His statements is said to be final binding statement of Iran committing to never having nuclear weapons (Jenkins and Dalton 2014: 1).

The US held several secret meetings with Iran from March 2013 to September 2013 about the differences over the Iranian nuclear programme. On the basis of that meetings, the six countries, namely- the US, UK, China, France, Russia and Germany, those are dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue popularly known as P5+1 (the five permanent member of UNSC plus Germany) or E3+3 (European 3+3) accepted the constructive change of posture that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2013. Since then the progress has been significant and encouraging (Jenkins and Dalton 2014: 1).

The two countries- Israel and the US, who consider the option of using military power for preventing Iran from processing the nuclear program, that idea was, even now, not supported by any other country, including in European countries. The US and Israel have also made it clear that the military option will only be used when all other diplomatic efforts have been failed. Since 2004, the US officials have declared that the

US is committed to stopping Iran from acquiring atomic weapons. Though both countries currently focusing on diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons they have also kept open other options, including military action, for stopping Iranian nuclear programme. The US President Bush has also revealed that it has conducted military exercises and war games relating to military action in Iran, and from time to time it has leaked information on planning for such action against Iranian nuclear activities (Kam 2007: 33).

Unlike to the US and Israeli considerations, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave clear message to the world when he indicated his policy towards Iranian nuclear programme. When a journalist asked him about Iranian Nuclear issue, he replied in a polite way that “peaceful nuclear activities must be allowed” and warned against using military force to resolve the Iranian nuclear dispute. But he avoided a question when asked whether Russia would supply nuclear fuel when Bushehr nuclear plant would be completed. But he said that Russia would not renege on its commitments to complete the plant. Till now, Moscow blocked new UN sanctions against the Iran and asked the IAEA, UN’s nuclear watchdog, to work with Iran on clearing up the disputes (Russia backs Iran Nuclear Rights 2007).

It is true that Russia would not like to see Iran as a nuclear power, but Russia does not share the US and Israeli opinion regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. However, during the US President Obama visits to Moscow in July 2009, the Russian President Medvedev and US President Obama issued a joint statement on “cooperation on missile defense and a joint threat assessment of the ballistic missile challenges of the 21st century, including those posed by Iran and North Korea.”¹⁴ The subsequent Joint Plan of Action (JPA), agreed on November 24, 2013, addressed concerns that Iran has been moving gradually towards a position to produce enough enriched uranium, only one step away from producing a nuclear bomb (Jenkins and Dalton 2014: 1).

With the aim to resolve Iranian nuclear disputes, Iran and six major world powers namely the US, the United Kingdom, France, Russian Federation, China and Germany

¹⁴ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/page/197>

(popularly known as P5+1) finalized a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on July 14, 2015. The JCPOA sought to ensure that Iranian nuclear activities can be pursued for civilian purpose only in exchange for a broad lifting of US, EU and UN sanctions on Iran. The agreement replaced a Joint Plan of Action (JPA), an interim agreement in effect from 2014 to 2016 (Katzman et. al. 2017: 1).

When the Iranian nuclear deal was announced in July 2015, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu criticized the agreement and stated that it was a “historic mistake” and Israel would not be bound by it. He also reiterated his argument in his speech at the UN General Assembly on October 2, 2015. However, some former officials from Israel’s security department have publicly claimed that the nuclear deal has positive aspects. When the deadline for US Congress to pass a resolution of disapproval of the Iranian nuclear deal has been expired in September 2015, some Israeli military officials have reportedly urged Netanyahu “to begin working on a joint US-Israeli strategy based on the deal’s premise that Iran’s nuclear program will indeed be frozen for 15 years” (Zanotti 2015: 3).

Before the comprehensive agreement was announced, the US and Israel reportedly began preliminary consultations on an aid and arms sales package to curtail Israeli concerns regarding the deal. Israeli leaders raised concern that the recent agreement and the lifting of sanctions might lead Iran to increased material support for Hezbollah and other Iranian allies. Israeli officials have also expressed apprehension that the recent Iranian nuclear deal, by preserving much of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, legitimizes the Iran’s ambitions to become a “nuclear threshold” in the West Asia. Such considerations are presumably driving Israeli leaders to seek tangible measures of reassurance from the US (Zanotti 2015: 3).

Russian President Putin welcomes the comprehensive agreement signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015 regarding the settlement of Iranian nuclear disputes and the joint comprehensive action plan approved by the six countries and Iran. The negotiations supported by the UNSC and involving parties- the US, UK, Russia, France, China and Germany, Iran and the EU (European Union) went on for many years. Russian President Putin remarked that the solution for the Iranian nuclear dispute is based on the principle of phasing and mutuality which our country has been insisting from many years.

President Putin remarked that “We are grateful to all those who invariably supported efforts to find reliable political and diplomatic solutions to the Iranian nuclear issue. The Russian negotiating team and nuclear experts have made a significant expert contribution to the drafting of the comprehensive arrangements, which made it possible to align the different, often opposing views. The IAEA will carefully monitor the implementation of the agreed steps to prove the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program” (Statement by President of Russia Vladimir Putin following completion of negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program 2015).

After the finalization of comprehensive agreement, Iran now has the legal rights to develop its nuclear program, including uranium enrichment, under the inspections of the IAEA. It is also noticeable that the large-scale peaceful nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran has also got support in the signed agreement. Russian President expressed hope that the all parties involved in the negotiations will comply with the deal. And the bilateral relations between Russia and Iran will receive a new impetus and will no longer be influenced by external factors. President Putin also asserted that Russia will ensure the full implementation of the Vienna agreements, assisting in strengthening global and regional security, global nuclear non-proliferation, and the creation of nuclear-weapons free zone in the West Asia (ibid).

In the wake of comprehensive agreement on Iranian nuclear issue, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow in September 2015 and talks to Russian President Vladimir Putin on many issues especially on the security concern of the State of Israel. He conveyed about the security concern of his country as he said, “I am here because of the security situation which is becoming ever more complex on our northern border. As you know, in recent years, Iran and Syria have been arming the extremist Islamic terrorist organization Hezbollah with advanced weapons, aimed at us, and over the years thousands of rockets and missiles have been fired against our cities. At the same time, Iran, under the auspices of the Syrian army, is attempting to build a second terrorist front against us from the Golan Heights. Our policy is to prevent these weapons transfers, and to prevent the creation of a terrorist front and attacks on us from the Golan Heights. Under these circumstances, I thought it was very important that I come here, also to

clarify our policies, and to make sure that there is no misunderstanding between our forces.” (PM Netanyahu meets with Russian President Putin 2015)

Russian President Vladimir Putin also replied in a positive way as he said “Let there be no doubt about this. We have never forgotten that in the State of Israel live very many émigrés from the former USSR. This has a special effect on our bilateral relations. All of Russia’s actions in the region will always be very responsible. We are aware of the shelling against Israel and we condemn all such shelling..... In regard to Syria, we know that the Syrian army is in a situation such that it is incapable of opening a new front. Our main goal is to defend the Syrian state. However, I understand your concern and I am very pleased that you have come here to discuss all issues in detail” (ibid).

The Russian support to Iranian nuclear programme possesses a serious challenge to the Russia-Israel relationship. On the one hand, the State of Israel considers Iranian nuclear programme as a serious security concern for its country and urging the international community’s to resolve the issue as soon as possible. On the other hand, the Russian Federation does not consider it as a security threat to the world community. Russian leadership has reiterated many times that Iran is signatory of nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and it has the right to pursue nuclear program for civilian purpose. After many rounds of negotiations between Iran and major world powers namely P5+1 (the US, Russia, China, France, UK and Germany), the Iranian Republic has agreed to allow the inspection of its nuclear establishments. However, the State of Israel expressed her concern about the intention of Iranian leaderships.

Russia’s approach to the Israeli-US relationships

Russia’s policy towards West Asia region is not always destined to be at odd relationship with the US. Russia shares same views with Washington on some issues such as the threat of Islamic terrorism. But, in regarding to the Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement, Moscow brokered as an independent player unlike to the US. Therefore,

Israel's close ties with the US are posing as a major hurdle in the development of Russia-Israel relationships.

US interests in the West Asia

The West Asia region has been an area of contests between major powers from time immemorial. The contemporary geopolitical situations in the West Asia are not much different. The introduction of contests between US and Soviet Union into this region during the World War Two added a global dimension to the regional conflicts. In compare to Russia, the US is relatively new player in this region (Rafael 1986: 561-562).

Until the end of the First World War, most of the West Asia region was under the formal control of the Ottoman Empire. To be sure, the US did not have colonial designs in the West Asia at that time. However, the region was not fully untouched from the growing worldwide influence of the US. In the religious-cultural field, the US missionaries were active in this region, especially in Syria and Lebanon. In the 20th century, the US dramatically transformed its involvement in the region. The transformation was reflected in the structural changes of the US economy and the changed world political and economic atmosphere in the aftermath of the First World War. By the turn of the century, the US economy and capital was in search of a market to adjust its production and squeeze the raw materials from there. The European economy, at that time, was weakened due to the costly world war that distorted the resources of all combatants (Alnasrawi 1989: 55-56).

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War provided the opportunity to the US to penetrate the political and economic life of the region and share the profit which Great Britain and France were to obtain in the aftermath of the First World War. The US policy towards this region focused on mainly two things. First, the US wanted to see the applicability of 'Open Door Policy' in the former colonies of Ottoman Empire since the US was seeking a free field for US enterprises in the region. Second, the US was interested to maintain political stability in the region, as a stable and orderly environment was considered to be essential for the expansion of economic and business interests (Alnasrawi 1989: 57).

The State of Israel has historically been enjoyed the support of the US. A 'special relationship' exists between the US and Israel particularly with regard to the US commitment to Israel's continuing security. Though both countries clashed over some issues e.g. status of the occupied Palestinian territories, building of new Israeli settlements in Gaza Strip and West Bank, creation of a sovereign Palestine state, and on the means to achieve these goals, the US support for State of Israel remains strong overall (Reich et. al. 2013: 99). Over the decades, the two concepts- "shared values" and "US' moral responsibility" has been the main pillars of US-Israel unique relationships. The "shared values" that dominate the US-Israel relationship includes the common perception on democracy, roots in Judeo-Christian culture, mutual experience in fighting for independence, and commitment to the rights of nations to live with peace and security. Secondly, the US as a lone superpower, bears moral responsibility to protect the small Jewish state. In addition to the 'shared values' and 'moral responsibility', the State of Israel also provides significant benefits to the US national interests and collaborative action to advance those interests (Blackwill et. al. 2011: 1-2).

As a global superpower, the US has a wide range of national interests in the West Asia region. These includes preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in this region; fighting against global terrorism; promoting democracy and economic development in the region; preventing the spread of Iranian influence in the region; ensuring the free flow of oil and gas at reasonable prices; to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict through peaceful means; and finally to ensure the security of the State of Israel. Israel's national interests in the West Asia region are also very similar to the US interests. Israel's national interests are virtually identical: to prevent the nuclear activities by Iran because it is directly related to its existence; to fight against global terrorism or radicalism; to promote peace and stability in the West Asian region; to promote the development of liberal democracies in the region; to maintain peaceful borders with its Arab neighbors (Blackwill et. al. 2011: 4-5).

The US interests in West Asia has not changed till the date it remain much the same as they have been for decades e.g. ensuring the uninterrupted flow of natural oil at reasonable prices; safeguarding the security of Israel as well as Washington's Arab allies

from external threats; preventing the emergence of a hostile regime in the region as Iraq's Saddam Hussein regime in the past; preventing Iran from acquiring the nuclear weapons; and fight against the Islamist fundamentalism and global terrorism. And since the Arab Spring, one can add to this list: supporting political reform and peaceful democratic transitions in the region (Eisenstadt and Pollock 2012: 3).

US-Israel Relations: Political Dimensions

The US-Israel relationship is often described as 'special relationship' between the two countries. The US was being committed to the Jewish cause prior to the formation of the State of Israel. The US President Woodrow Wilson was committed to Zionism and he also supported for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Wilson administration did not object to the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which set a legal cornerstone for the future creation of the State of Israel (Alnasrawi 1989: 57).

Although the US wanted to see a Jewish national home in Palestine, its policy was strictly hands-off. The US administration considered it as an exclusive British concern, and the Arab-Jewish problem was a British headache. Accordingly, the US President Roosevelt made no objection to British decision when it brought 'White Paper' in 1939 to limit the Jewish immigration into Palestine. Deferring to the British and Arab demands, the US confined hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors in displaced-persons camps in Europe rather than let them immigrate to Palestine (Michael B. Oren 2008). In June 1945, the US President Truman adopted a proposal recommending that 100,000 European Jews living in refugee camp would be allowed to immigrate to Palestine immediately. For this, he communicated with the British government, which expressed unwillingness to implement the proposal cited the reason that it would alienate opinion in the Arab world (Lieber 1998: 12).

After the end of the Second World War, the US support for a Jewish national homeland grew with the intention to settle the large number of Jewish refugees, displaced persons, and survivors of the Nazi holocaust. Consequently, the US President Harry Truman supported the partition of Palestine into Jewish and an Arab State. The President Truman against the advice and wishes of the Departments of State and Defense

recognized the State of Israel within minutes after Israel declared its independence. At a resentfully and controversial meeting in the White House on May 12, 1948, Clark Clifford, President Truman's advisor, argued strongly for immediate recognition of the Jewish state. In contrast, the Secretary of State George C. Marshall expressed strong disagreement with Clifford's advice and stated that if he has to vote, he would vote against the President. After some confusion and disarray between the White House and the US delegation to the United Nations, the US did announce de facto recognition to the State of Israel within minutes after the declaration of independence on May 14, 1948. However, the US administration did not at first lift an arms embargo, and an Israeli loan request was, as Steven L. Spiegel notes, delayed by the bureaucracy until January 1949 (Lieber 1998: 12).

Since its formation in May 1948, the State of Israel has developed a democratic political system committed to the rule of law, civilian oversight of the military, separation of powers, civilian rights, and a dynamic and innovative scientific and business environment. As US interests in this region developed after the end of Second World War, the Israel's interests developed in an increasingly pro-US direction. Many Israelis opined that the US has been Israel's only strategic partner and true friend. In turn, the US Presidents have also pledged their commitment to Israel's security for decades, which many described as a national interest of the US. At the core of the US commitment towards Israel, there is a robust aid relationship which US provides to the State of Israel. Israel has become the largest recipient of the US foreign assistance and one of the most advanced military powers of the world (Malka 2011).

Indeed, the US-Israel relationship was being very much depended upon US military and economic assistance to Israel. However, the US was very slow to provide military and economic assistance to Israel. The crises in the US-Israel relationship emerged during the Arab-Israeli war of 1956 or Suez Crisis, when the US administration of President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles exert pressure on Israel to withdraw its forces from the Sinai Peninsula which it had conquered from Egypt in the October 1956 war (Lieber 1998: 13). In 1957, the US President D. Eisenhower announced on a national television that America would support UN sanctions against

Israel unless it withdraw its forces from Gaza and all other Egyptian territories captured during the 1956 Suez crisis. Israel stunned by this US diplomatic stand and quickly agreed to pull out its military troops from the occupied territory (Little 1993: 563). In the decade of 1950s and early mid-1960s, the US military and economic assistance to Israel remained quite low. As late as 1967, the US annual assistance to Israel amounted to just \$13 million. However, in the aftermath of Six Day War of 1967, the US assistance to Israel increases sharply, amounted to \$76 million in 1968 and \$600 million in 1971 (Lieber 1998: 13). The US was remaining silent on Israeli actions during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel not only captured Gaza but also Golan Heights from Syria and Jordan's West Bank during the same. Many observers described it as the effect of the "Israel lobby" in the US administration (Little 1993: 563). However, the foundations for close relationship between the US and Israel were laid out by the US Presidents Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) and John F. Kennedy (1961-1963). Those Presidents were more concerned about long-term stability in the West Asia rather than about short-run domestic political considerations. President Eisenhower considered the State of Israel as the potential ally in the West Asia in his struggle to restrain Soviet-backed revolutionary Arab nationalism, but at the same time, he also disturbed by emerging signs of early 1960s that Israel was on the edge of acquiring nuclear weapons. The next US President John F. Kennedy moved to strengthen relations with Israel by providing sophisticated military hardware and by promising US aids in the event of Arab aggression. When the next US President Lyndon Johnson took charge in November 1963, he expected that a strong Israel might serve as a pro-Western bulwark against future Soviet gains in the West Asia region and he also feared that a weak Israel might acquire nuclear weapons. These two assumptions had laid the ground for a 'special relationship' between the two countries that was cemented by the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Ironically, President Johnson's decision to provide conventional weapons to Israel and embrace it as a "strategic asset" did not prohibit it from acquiring nuclear weapons (Little 1993: 563-64).

Actually, the US-Israel relations have been built on two mutually reinforcing assumptions- political and geopolitical. First, both countries are democratic in nature and committed to the rule of law. Both countries share a deep and abiding commitment to the values of a Western-style democracy. Second, the US and Israel share a common

strategic outlook regarding the regional threats and challenges. During the cold war era, the two countries worked together to restrain the Soviet expansion in the West Asia and neighboring countries. And in the post-Cold War period, the two countries worked together to settle the Arab-Israeli conflicts to promote regional security and stability. The collapse of the Oslo peace process in 2000 and followed by the 9/11 terror attacks on Washington prevailed the notion that Israel and the US were fighting the same enemy in the global war on terrorism. The events renewed a sense of common purpose and shared values (Malka 2011).

The US President Barak Obama has maintained the country's decade-long commitment to Israel and its security. In the budget of 2010, President Obama increased by \$2.775 billion for the security-related aid to Israel. The mentioned aid is an integral part of \$30 billion agreement for the period of 10 years. In 2009, the US had secretly sold bunker-buster bombs to Israel. The news of secret deal opened up in 2011 which led to speculation that the US was facilitating to Israel for the future attacks on Iran. The Obama administration has also approved more than \$200 million for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system and in July 2012, Obama administration approved an additional \$70 million to strengthen the system (Friedman 2012: 13).

The Israel-US relationship under the Netanyahu and Obama period underwent from a severe crisis in their history. The Iranian nuclear programme was the main issue which has been driving the growing split between the two countries. The two countries have fundamentally different views and different strategic priorities regarding the situation of West Asia. They have different threat perceptions as the one is global superpower and the other is small regional power. The dynamics of difference between two countries are rooted in the two administrations' values, ideologies and political agendas. The Obama administration sees the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the root cause of all problems of the West Asia, while, on the other hand, Netanyahu administration's priority to eliminate Iranian nuclear program first, which he perceived as the main threat to his country and the main cause of instability in the West Asian region (Etzion 2016: 1).

Economic Cooperation between the US and Israel

Apart from political relationship between the US and Israel, both countries has also been cooperating in the economic spheres as well. On January 19, 1949, the Export-Import bank authorized a credit of \$100,000,000 to Israel; of them \$35,000,000 was allocated immediately to assist in financing Israel's purchase of equipment, materials, and services for the development of agricultural products, and the remaining \$65,000,000 was earmarked to be available until December 31, 1949, to help in financing projects under study in the fields of transportation, communication, manufacturing, housing and public works. On June 9, 1949, the Bank of America advanced \$15,000,000 to the Keren Kayemet L'Israel, Limited, Jerusalem. This was the first major large-scale loan of a non-governmental character made to an Israeli corporation. The funds were understood to be needed to compensate Arabs who fled their homes during the hostilities (Shub 1950: 135).

On April 22, 1985, the US and Israel signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This was the US's first bilateral free trade agreement with any country and Israel's second free trade agreement with any country (Israel had already been signed a free trade agreement with European Community in 1975). (US-Israel Trade Relations) With the signing of the FTA with Israel, the US strove to challenge the European community as Israel's primary trade partner. In addition, Israel was the only country that had signed FTA with both- the US and European Community (EC). This unique status of the Israel offered US enterprises the unique opportunity to use Israel as a springboard to reach the European Community markets (Galper 1995: 2030-2031).

The US-Israel FTA entered into force in September 1985 after the approval of US House of Representatives by a 422-0 vote and by a voice vote in the US Senate. After the signing of FTA, the US President Ronald Reagan said that "the Free Trade Area Agreement symbolizes once again our two countries' deep community of interest and our shared values and aspirations for a better future. It underscores the importance of Israel to the US as an ally, as a trading partner, and as a friend." (US-Israel Trade Relations)

Prior to the signing of FTA between the US and Israel, Israel benefitted from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which is a unilateral trade preference program that allows goods from developing countries to enter the US without customs duties. In

the beginning of 1970s, Israel was also a recipient of US economic aid. The FTA resulted in the mutual liberalization of bilateral trade and the eventual elimination of US economic aids to Israel (US-Israel Trade Relations).

Under the FTA, the US and Israel agreed to implement phase-wise tariff reductions culminating in the complete elimination of duties on manufactured goods on January 1, 1995. The FTA also allowed the US and Israel to maintain certain import restrictions, such as quantitative restrictions and fees, other than customs duties, on agricultural products based on agricultural policy considerations. Nonetheless, over 90% of US agricultural exports by value enter Israel duty free. (US-Israel Trade Relations) On January 1, 1995, the US and Israel implemented the final tariff reductions as per the provisions of US-Israel FTA signed in 1985. Declaring the 1995 the “Year of US-Israel Free Trade”, the two countries celebrated the full implementation of the US-Israel FTA. During the period from 1985 to 1994, the US exports to Israel had nearly tripled, while the Israel exports to the US had more than doubled during the same period (Galper 1995: 2031-2032).

The US trade relations with the State of Israel in goods and services totaled \$45 billion in 2012. While the US imports from Israel accounted for \$27 billion, the US exports to Israel accounted for only \$18 billion. The US trade deficit with Israel was \$9 billion in 2012. As per the trade statistics of 2013, Israel positioned 25th place in terms of goods trade with the US totaled \$36 billion (two ways). The US goods export to Israel amounted for \$14 billion, on the other hand, the US imports from Israel accounted for \$23 billion. The US trade deficit, in terms of goods trade, with Israel was \$9 billion in 2013. Regarding the trade in services, the US trade with Israel (exports and imports) accounted for \$9.3 billion in 2012. The US services exports to Israel were equal to \$4.1 billion; on the other hand, the US services imports from Israel were equal to \$5.2 billion in 2012. The US services trade deficit with Israel was \$1.1 billion in 2012 (US-Israel Trade Facts).

Israel positioned 23rd place in terms of US goods export market in 2013. US goods exports to Israel totaled \$13.7 billion in 2013, slightly down 3.7% (equal to \$530 million) from the previous years, but up 99% since 2002. And since 1984, US exports to

Israel up 526 percent. The top export products in 2013 were: Precious Stones (diamonds) (valued \$5.8 billion), Electrical Machinery (valued \$1.6 billion), Machinery (\$1 billion), Aircraft (\$823 million), and Optic and Medical instruments (\$666 million). The US exports of agricultural products to Israel totaled \$627 million in 2013 which included tree nuts (\$89 million), Soybeans (\$83 million), and wheat (\$61 million). Another side, Israel was the 21st largest supplier of goods to the US in the year of 2013. The US goods imports from Israel totaled \$22.7 billion in 2013, an increase of 2.5% (\$546 million) from the previous year and up 78% from 2003, and from 1984 (pre-FTA) it up 1195 percent. However, the US imports from Israel accounted for only one percent of overall US imports in 2013. The items which dominated the US imports from Israel were: Precious Stones (diamonds) (valued \$9 billion), Pharmaceutical Products (\$5.4 billion), Electrical Machinery (\$1.4 billion), Machinery (\$1.4 billion), and Optic and Medical Instruments (\$1.3 billion). The US imports of agricultural products from Israel totaled \$327 million in 2013 which included snack foods (including chocolate) (\$54 million), and planting seeds (\$35 million) (US-Israel Trade Facts).

The US foreign direct investment (FDI) in Israel (stock) was \$10.2 billion in 2012, an increase of 10.1 percent from 2011. The US direct investment in Israel is primarily concentrated in the manufacturing sector. On the other hand, Israel FDI in the US (stock) was \$9.8 billion in 2012, slightly down 2.7% from 2011. Israel's FDI in the US was also led by the manufacturing sector. (US-Israel Trade Facts)

Russia's concern over US-Israel relationship

The pattern of Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy towards US has been dominated by a series of inconstancy. In the initial post-Soviet period, from 1991 to 1993, Russian policy-makers sought to align their country with the West in general and US in particular. They believed that Russia belongs to 'Western' fundamentally and it should shed its imperial past and should enter the community of liberal, democratic states. The then Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev referred to Western countries as Russia's natural allies. He saw the US as an important partner for the newly emergent democratic Russia and further quoted that "For too many years confrontation with that country has been artificially developed. Today we do not see any reasons that could

prevent the promotion of fruitful cooperation between Russia and the US. We do not share the fears voiced in certain quarters that the USA will now be dictating its will to us, emerging as the sole superpower in the world etc. this approach could lead to a recurrence of old stereotypes. We do not threaten anyone and we believe that no developed democratic civil society can pose a threat to us” (Ambrosio 2005: 1193-1194).

However, this pro-West policy could not be sustained due to the domestic objections to a foreign policy which was seen as making unilateral concessions to the US. Russian grand strategy shifted from the policy of bandwagoning to the policy of balancing American power and influence in the international system. The pro-US Russian foreign minister Kozyrev was replaced by the hardliner Yevgeni Primakov, who sought to put Russia on the path of promoting multipolarity. Primakov asserted that Russia must establish itself as great power by playing the crucial role as a balancer. He quoted that “Russia in her transition from the bipolar world to the multipolar one should play the role of a counterweight to the negative trends that are appearing in international affairs. In the course of this transition not all power centers, determining this multipolarity, have yet formed. And somebody [namely, the US] wants to dominate in this situation (Ambrosio 2005: 1194).

The close relationship between the US and Israel is a major obstacle for the development of the Russia-Israel relations. During the cold war period, the US has the main rivalry with the Soviet Union, the predecessor of the Russian Federation. In the post-cold war period, Russia is also challenging the unipolar world system, ultimately challenging the supremacy of the US in the world politics. The US-Russia relations today reflect a classic case of security dilemma. Mutual suspicion between Russia and the US go beyond natural concerns about each other’s build-up of offensive capabilities threatening. For example, Russia views the US-led ballistic missile defense project as a threat to Russia’s nuclear deterrent capability, while Washington and Europe consider military exercises in Russia’s westernmost regions and in Belarus in 2010 and 2011 as rehearsals of suspiciously harsh reprisals against neighboring NATO and neutral states” (Troitskiy 2011: 79).

The rapprochement between Russia and Israel is real, but this friendship needs to be seen in overall perspective and must not be overestimated. Each side is convinced of the usefulness of an ambitious relationship, but at the same time, there are certain limitations in their relationship. The special relationship between Israel and the US still has a good future. The US shared special responsibility to protect Israel as, in 2008, it has promised to sell 75 F-35 stealth bombers to the Israeli air force. The US administration also agreed to install American radar station in the Negev desert to reinforce Israeli defenses against potential ballistic missile attacks by Iran or Syria. There is no reason for special relationship to be reappraised in the foreseeable future, whatever the composition of the new American administration. Equally, there seems to be no reason for the Israelis to question their relationships with European countries, or with NATO, an organization they perceive as a purveyor of security in the Mediterranean (RAZOUX 2008: 8).

The NATO members must not worry about the Israel's relations with the Moscow. There is no any hidden agenda behind the good relations between Russia and Israel. Rather Israel keenly desire to cultivate good relations with Russia, just like many European countries. Israel tried to avoid an exacerbation of tensions that would be little benefit to anyone and of great detriment to everyone. There is no point in deluding ourselves that Israel might break off its links with Russia in the name of the new "cold war" that some politicians on both sides of the Atlantic seem to be hoping for. Israel has clearly stated that it would remain maintain good relations with both- the US and Russia. In 2008, Israel refused the repeated request from the US administration to freeze its negotiations with Syria following the Basher Al-Assad's friendly talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Moscow just few days after Russia's military actions in Georgia. Israel might also have refused to break its relations with Russia if the US had asked to do so. Israel's refusal to freeze negotiations with Syria was a shocking situation for western countries because they considered the Jewish State as their bridgehead in the West Asia region. However, Israelis considered that they could be a "bridge" between Russians and Americans. And this would also be in the interest of NATO member countries, at the time when the Russia is intensifying its presence in the Mediterranean Sea (RAZOUX 2008: 8).

Russia-Israel relation is very complex in nature, both countries shared same views on some issues and different opinion on another issues. The world financial crisis, the Iranian crisis and the Georgian Crisis are some issues that can be illuminating through the prism of this complex relationship. The seeming contradictions of this odd relationship are a constant source of serious concern and perplexity to the Western world, and to NATO in particular. In 2008, Russia sent its army to the Georgian territory and produces herself as an essential player on the world stage. Russia accused Israel of supplying arms and giving training to the Georgian army. In the wakeup of Georgian crisis, Russia and Israel abolished their visa regulations in September 2008, thus facilitating reciprocal trade (RAZOUX 2008: 1).

Russia's desire to regain its superpower status defines its actions in the international arena, especially in regards to the US. The US actions, on the other hand, reflect its desire to maintain its status as the lonely superpower in the world. Historically, Russia's relationship with the US is an offshoot of the USSR's relation with the US, characterized by competitiveness, extreme high and extreme low, and the occasional mutual interest. These factors continue to describe the present day relationship between Russia and the US (Perez 2014: 1).

US President Barak Obama deserve the credit for his initial efforts to ease the tensions between the US and Russia. The relations between the two countries had deteriorated after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. The US president Obama tried to reverse the deterioration in bilateral relations after meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in April 2009 in London. But the relations between the two countries are not likely to improve appreciably because of fundamental differences in values, interests and outlook between the two countries' leaderships. President Obama also visited Moscow in July 2009 where he and Russian president Medvedev issued a number of joint statements which included the transit of US equipment across Russian territory for forces needed in Afghanistan and a framework for an arms control treaty. Mr. Obama also talks with the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the opposition leaders and civil society activists. President Obama dismissed a notion that Russia and the US were destined to be enemies, and he expressed his desire to develop a new tone in the bilateral

dialogue and ‘reset’ relations between the two countries. At the same time, Obama also indicated that the US would not abandon certain fundamental positions that have been the source of disagreement with the Russian leadership in the past, such as recognizing no Russian sphere of influence, maintaining an open-door policy for aspiring members of NATO, and prioritizing human rights and democracy (Kramer 2010: 61-62). However, US Vice President Joseph R. Biden made a controversial comment when he was returning from a July trip to Georgia and Ukraine. He referred to Russia’s looming demographic crisis, its withering economy, and its difficulty in adjusting to “loss of empire” (Kramer 2010: 62).

There are four issues that likely to dominate the bilateral relationship between the US and Russia for the foreseeable future: the US policy towards Russia’s neighboring countries, missile defense, strategic challenges such as Iran and developments in Russian domestic policy. The United States’ increasing influence in the Russia’s neighboring countries such as Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, the Caucasus region (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) is the main cause of difference between Moscow and Washington. Since Russia considers this region as its sphere of influence and sees US presence in the region as a threat (Blechman 2009). President Obama in his address to the ‘New Economic School Graduation, Moscow’ on July 7, 2009, he rejected the Russian sphere of influence in crystal clear terms as he said, “There is the 20th century view that the United States and Russia are destined to be antagonists, and that a strong Russia or a strong America can only assert themselves in opposition to one another. And there is a 19th century view that we are destined to vie for spheres of influence, and that great powers must forge competing blocs to balance one another. These assumptions are wrong. In 2009, a great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries. The days when empires could treat sovereign states as pieces on a chess board are over.....the pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game- progress must be shared. That's why I have called for a ‘reset’ in relations between the United States and Russia. This must be more than a fresh start between the Kremlin and the White House”. (Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation)

However, the US dominance in the West Asia has been challenged over the past few years. Iran's continuous progress towards a nuclear proliferation, the erosion of US influence in Iraq, the diminishing influence in the Syrian crisis, the Arab monarchs' doubts on the reliability of the US, and cooling of relations with Israel have indicated that the US is increasingly hard pressed to advance its policy in the region (Guzansky 2013: 25). Nevertheless, Israel's close relationship with the US is a serious concern for Russian Federation and that is one of the main cause that prohibit Russia to go ahead for the full-fledged relationship with the State of Israel. Russia has a long history of competitiveness and mutual distrust with the US. The US has many differences with Russia even in the post-cold war period, though it is the issue of NATO expansion or Russia's support to the Iranian nuclear programme. In the post-cold war era, especially after Putin's accession to power, Russia is being challenging the US dominance in the world order and refused to accept US' unilateral decision. Russia's great power ambitions compelled it to challenge US' unilateral decisions.

Russia's approach towards Arab Spring: a Case of Syria

In the beginning of 2010s, a series of protests and demonstrations erupted across the West Asia and North Africa region, commonly known as 'Arab Spring'. The term 'Arab Spring' although indicate the positive development towards the democratization, it was also reflect the cause of tensions and unrest in this region. The Arab spring started with the tragic self-immolation of a young fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010 in Tunisia. The death of Mohamed Bouazizi sparked a series of protests and demonstrations in the Tunisia that led to the removal of current Tunis President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from the power. The success of the demonstrations in Tunisia led to a wave of unrest in a number of countries in the North African and West Asia region such as Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Yemen and Syria etc. The immediate causes of this unrest were varied from country to country but mostly were derived from the domestic issues such as lack of democracy, violation of human rights, corruption, economic crisis, poverty, unemployment and rising food prices etc. (Rozsa 2012: 1). The Arab spring resulted in the overthrow of some sitting governments in some countries and some other countries have to bring political reforms in the system.

The Arab Spring which started in December 2010 was viewed by most Western countries as the beginning of the new era and the gradual shifting of these West Asia and North African countries towards democracy. However, Russian leadership reacted to this development with apprehension and deep anxiety. Russia, initially, welcomed this move and supported the political reforms in these countries. Vladimir Putin himself expressed the sympathies of Russians to the Arab people who were struggling for the democratic reforms (Dannreuther 2015: 79). The political unrest in the initial two countries- Tunisia and Egypt, posed no significant threats to the Russian interests in this region because of limited connection between Russia and these two countries. Some Russian analysts recognized that contemporary political regimes in the North African countries had been in power since long time and had become too corrupt and had failed to address the changing nature of their societies. However, the dominant narrative among the Russian analysts was that the Arab Spring was much more a return to the traditional values of an Islamic society rather than a western-style democracy (Dannreuther 2015: 80). Russian President Putin said, “In my opinion, this is happening because some people from the outside believe that if the region were to be brought in compliance with a certain idea-an idea that some calls democracy- then peace and stability would ensue. That’s not how it works. You can’t ignore this region’s history, traditions and religious beliefs, and you can’t just interfere. Look at what happened in Libya. Whether the regime was good or bad, the living standards in the country were the highest in the region. And what do we have now? There’s fighting over resources, incessant clashes between tribes, and no one knows where that might lead.” (Putin talks NSA, Syria, Iran, drones in RT interview 2013)

The Syrian Crisis

Syria is a country located in the West Asia region, on the coast of East Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon and thus holds an important position in this region. During the Arab awakening in 2011-2012, the Assad regime of Syria failed to anticipate the wave of change. In an interview to the Wall Street Journal on January 31, 2011, the Syrian President Bashar al Assad stated that “the protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen are ushering a new era in the West Asia and North

Africa, and that Arab rulers would need to do more to accommodate their people's rising political and economic aspirations." (Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad 2011)

However, the protests and demonstrations spread to the territory of the Syria also. In February 2011, the protests began in the city of Daraa and later spread to the other city of the Syria. However, Syrian President Bashar al Assad used security forces to suppress the peaceful demonstrations by the Syrian people which ultimately made the Syrian crisis global issue. The use of brutal and oppressive measures by the Assad government to counteract opposition spread the movements to the other cities of Syria such as Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Homs. There were some reasons that agitated the Syrian people to call a protest for reforms against the Assad government. The demand of the Syrian people can be evaluated in four different areas: (1) the Syrian people demand for the removal of state emergency which has been existed since the March 8, 1963; (2) to restructure the government institutions like legislative, executive and judiciary and to civilianize the most government institutions; (3) to define individual rights (naturalization of Syria's Kurds) and to ensure an equitable share of income; (4) to make changes in the code of conduct of the political parties and to minimize the power of the Baath Party in government (Sandikli et al. 2014: 6-7).

In March 6, 2011 fifteen school children were arrested and tortured for painting anti-government graffiti on a school wall of Syria's southern city Dara. The people came out in the supports of student and they united against the Assad regime. The brutality of police had become major concern for Syrian people. They demanded justice for arrested children but government ignored the repression by Assad government reached on highest point. The protestors reacted in exasperation, and the mood of demand has changed. Now protesters demanded to end of Assad government. The brutality of police once again erupted and six protesters died in a clash. Next day on March 7, some 20,000 people attended the funeral procession of these deceased, and protested against the crackdown carried out by Syrian security forces. News of the events at Dara'a had sparked up further resentment against the government as protesters began to demand an all-encompassing

change in the scheme of affairs. When the government refused to bring change, the protesters demanded an end to the Assad regime (Richard 2014: 41).

Syria engulfed in a civil war after the protests emerge from different quarters. However the people united and concentrated action targeted to resolving the crisis. Some of the protesters started armed rebellion against the regime. The armed resistance by people provided an opportunity to Assad regime to cruel crush and bloodiest suppression.

The armed resistance has largely taken the form of the Free Syrian Army, a varied force of defectors from Assad's armed services, as well as mercenaries and a bunch of uncompromising fundamentalists. Gradually, the domestic violence in Syria had worsened the condition and developed into a full-fledged civil war with huge destruction of lives and properties (Richard 2014: 41).

Russia's intervention in Syrian Crisis

Russia has varied interest in the West Asia but most prominent interests are related with the border security and business interests especially in the field of energy. Arms supply to the countries in the region is also a major interest of Russia. Russia's policy towards West Asia has also been inspired by Russian ambition to broaden its international stature. However the civil war in Syria has provided space to the Russia to underscore the weight of its position in international affairs. (Zvyagelskaya 2016: 73).

Russia maintained her position constant in regards to Syrian crisis since it has started in March 2011. Russia urged all sides for the immediate suspension of use of force and called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through broad-based national dialogue without outside interference (Bagdonas 2012: 57). When an interviewer asked about Russia's stand on the recognition of the United Syrian opposition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov replied that "We don't need to recognize anybody. We are working with all the parties representing various groups of the Syrian opposition without exception. We are prepared to work with the National Coalition or any other structure that the opposition may form in this political field." (The ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation)

Russia's multifaceted ties with Syria and strategic posture of Syria towards the Western countries, especially the US, spurred Moscow to support Assad regime to the bitter end. Russia's interests in the Syria are not only military and strategic, but also commercial and cultural too. Russia's interest in Syria has been to secure its foothold in Tartus air base, the only remaining Russian air base in the West Asia region, and where many dual Russian-Syrian citizens live (Borshchevskaya 2013; Spaulding et. al. 2015: 1). The fall of Qaddafi regime in Libya has also contributed to Putin's obstinacy on Syria. According to Russian sources such as RIA Novosti and Utro.ru, Russia lost about \$4 billion worth of weapons contracts with Libya when Muammar Qaddafi regime fell down, thus Putin didn't want this to repeat in Syria. Syria has long been a customer of Russian weaponry, and the arms trade intensified after the Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000 in the respective countries. According to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, Syria has import 78% of its weapons from Russian Federation between 2007 and 2012. And according to the *Congressional Research Service*, Russian arms export to Syria reached by \$4.7 billion during the period of 2007 to 2010, this figure is just double in compare to the figure for previous four years. Moreover, Russia is now the world's second largest arms exporter after the US (Borshchevskaya 2013). Apart from arms trade, Russian companies have invested \$20 billion in Syria since 2009, according to *Moscow Times*. Therefore, Moscow worries that if Assad regime fell down, these contracts would be forfeited. Another stake is the huge Russian loans to the Assad regime. According to flight manifests obtained by ProPublica, Russia flew more than two hundred tons of "banknotes" to the Assad regime in summer 2011, when the fighting escalated. Such shipments may be the only reason Assad has managed to avoid bankruptcy and keep paying his forces as the country's foreign reserves have dwindled (Borshchevskaya 2013).

Therefore, it was very hard for Russian administration to neglect recent developments in the Syria. If the Assad regime in Syria falls, there may be a need to evacuate thousands of Russians from Syria. Russia may also lose its prestige and influence in this region (Norberg 2013: 1). The geopolitical scenario has changed since the arriving of Russian and Iranian forces in Syria in September 2015. The security forces of Bashar al-Assad and the soldiers of Iranian Revolutionary Guard with the help of

Russian air forces succeeded in counteract against the rebellion forces that threatened to fall down the Assad regime a year ago. But at the same time, the intervention of Russian and Iranian forces into the battlefield of Syrian crisis was not decisive. In spite of initial defeat of rebellion forces, the rebellion in Syria is far from over, even though it was Russia's primary goal. However, Russia was succeeded in stabilizing the Assad regime and the perception of Russia's strength against her rivals increases in the region and the world as well. But after some time, the Putin administration faced a dilemma- whether to intensify its involvement in the Syrian civil war, or to seek exit from this Syrian quagmire (Zisser 2016: 41).

On September 30, 2015, the Russian military forces were embarked on a series of operations in Syria. Russia's decision to embark military operations had been prepared with the establishment of a base in the south of Latakia in the beginning of the September 2015. However, the motives and aims of Russian government behind the military operations are still unclear. The Moscow administration has always avoided to join the US-led coalition of 60 states that was formed to counter the Islamic State (IS); rather it began early on to forge an alliance with Syria, Iran, Iraq and Lebanese Hezbollah, although they are pursuing different interests (Kaim et al. 2015).

The Russian Federation has also protected Assad regime at international organizations. On February 4, 2012, the Russia along with China vetoed a western-sponsored UNSC resolution that called for the removal of Syrian President Assad. This was repeated again on July 19, 2012 when Russia along with China vetoed another UNSC resolution aimed imposing economic sanctions if President Assad would not end violence against Syrian opposition groups (Richard 2014: 43). Russia also criticized the European Union, the United States and Arab countries for imposing unilateral sanctions against Syria. In addition, Russia also vehemently opposed the introduction of a no-fly zone over Syria (Menkiszak 2013: 3).

Israel's View on Arab Spring: the case of Syrian Crisis

Israel is located in the West Asia region and surrounded by the Arab neighbors with whom it has complex relationship. It is obvious that any developments in the Arab

world would also affect the State of Israel too. Although Israel is located adjacent to the conflict areas, it has very different interests in Syria from those of the Western countries. Israel has several principal objectives in the Syria conflict: to minimize the Russian and Iranian influence in Syria; to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah; to prevent Syria from posing a military threat to Israel or permitting Iran to do so; to undermine the legitimacy of Syria's claims to the Golan Heights; and preventing Sunni extremists from establishing operational bases near Israeli border. However, Israel has little ability to influence the events on the ground in Syria, giving it few tools for advancing its goals directly (Hanauer 2016: 3).

Israeli observers and politicians have different views on the ongoing political and social unrest in the West Asia and North Africa region. For some observers, the ongoing political and social movements in the Arab countries spell trouble. The fall down of pre-existing regimes in the Arab world paved the way for regional instability and insecurity. There is also a general anxiety towards the rise political Islamic parties. These parties are believed to have more antagonist feelings towards the Israel than the pre-existing authoritarian regimes. However, some other Israeli observers do not share this negative assessment. They assert that the Islamic parties and organizations in the region are far from monolithic, and that the rise of "Muslim Brotherhood-brand" of political Islam actually negatively affects the popularity of armed groups like Hezbollah (Berti: 130).

Whereas the US and Europe are concerned principally about the destabilizing regional influence of Sunni extremists such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, Israel is primarily concerned about the influence of Iran, exerting so close to Israel's borders. Although Sunni extremists in Syria could turn their attention towards Israel at some point, to date, they have been more interested in expanding their influence in the Arab world and resisting the Shia government in Iran and Assad government in Syria by fighting each other. The multi-factional civil war in Syria threatens the stability of the US allies-Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, but it does not pose an immediate threat to Israeli security (Hanauer 2016: 1-2).

However, Israel has adopted impartial views towards Syrian civil war. Israel's Defense minister, while summarizing the discussions between Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin, stated that “We are not involved in who will control Syria. Assad or not Assad, we are not entering that discussion at all”. In the long run, Israel would like to see Syria led by a moderate central government that controls its territory, and yet is too weak to threaten Israel militarily (Hanauer 2016: 2).

In the post-cold war era, the Syrian crisis posed a major threat to international security. The international community is heavily divided on the issue of Syrian civil war. On the one hand, the western countries brought many resolutions in the UN Security Council regarding the removal of Syrian President Assad or impose economic sanctions as a means to pressurize Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for his inhumane treatment of Syrian people. On the other hand, Russia along with China vetoed on UNSC resolutions aimed at imposing economic sanctions on Syria. Despite of knowing the authoritarian rule of President Assad, Russia is working to protect Assad regime at all level including in the UN Security Council. Actually, Russia’s aim to protect Assad regime lies in several reasons: Russia does not want to lose its major ally in the West Asia region; Russia’s ambitions to recognize itself as great power; and, it is also worrying for the spread of Islamist terrorism that can reach to Russian territories.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Russia's relations with the State of Israel dated back to the establishment of the State of Israel. Russia (then Soviet Union) had played a significant role in the formation of the State of Israel. In November 1947, Soviet Union with other Soviet Republics backed the UN partition plan for Palestine into two states- the Jewish and Arab States. The Soviet Union had not only supported the UN partition plan for Palestine, it also became the first country who gave de jure recognition to the State of Israel, when it announced the independence on May 14, 1948. Subsequently, Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with the newly emerged Jewish state. In addition, Soviet Union also supported the State of Israel in its war of independence, when it was attacked by the then Western-oriented Arab countries, opposing the UN partition plan for Palestine.

However, this friendly relationship could not last longer. The incidence of 'Doctors' Plot' and a bomb explosion in the premises of Soviet legation in Tel Aviv created a ruckus in the relationship between Soviet Union and the State of Israel. Consequently, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin broke up the diplomatic relationship with the Jewish state. However, the diplomatic relationship between the two countries was reinstated in July 1953 within four months from Stalin's death. But the relationship between the two countries was not the same as before. The Soviet Union sided with Arab countries against Israel in the next Arab-Israeli wars. Soviet Union provided arms and weapons to Egypt (via Czechoslovakia) when it was attacked by the joint forces of Great Britain, France and Israel during the Suez Crisis, 1956.

The turning point between the Soviet Union and the State of Israel came during the Six-Day war between Israel and Arab countries occurred in June 1967. Soviet Union once again severed diplomatic relationship with the State of Israel and could not reinstate until 1991. Although the diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel did not exist from 1967 to 1991, the government representatives of both countries held discussions occasionally on the sidelines of the UN annual meetings keeping some hopes

for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. After coming to power, Mikhail Gorbachev moved forward in this direction and started official dialogues with the State of Israel. The Soviet leadership reestablished diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in October 1991, just two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, its superpower status has gone, ultimately resulted in the end of the cold war between the two superpowers. The newly emerged state- Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, adopted democratic political system and open market economy. In the changed political manner, the Russian Federation moved forward to improve relations with all major countries of the West Asia. In this sequence, Moscow moved ahead to enhance its relationship with the State of Israel with whom Moscow had strained relationship during the major period of the cold war era. In addition, Russia has also maintained its relationship with the Arab countries, where it (then Soviet Union) had invested a lot during the cold war period. In the post-cold war period, Russia worked to develop its relationship with Israel in every field. The State of Israel has become second largest trading partner of Russia in the West Asia region. Both countries are also developing relations in hi-tech, innovation, energy and military sector.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical situation of the West Asia region has also been changed. The main sponsor of the Arab countries had become history. In the changed international scenarios, Arab countries decided to negotiate with the State of Israel. The State of Israel has also realized the seriousness of the war and decided to come to the negotiating table with the Arab countries. Learning from the past experiences, the Russian Federation worked to improve relationship with the State of Israel to seek a major role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Soviet Union, the predecessor of the Russian Federation, had not been invited to the Camp David Accords occurred in 1978 due to the absence of the diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel. Since there was no diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel, Moscow could not put pressure on Israel to negotiate with Arab countries. In addition, Arab countries had also lost their faith in the Soviet Union as an effective broker because it could not arrange meetings for peace settlements with the State of Israel. Egypt, the

most trusted ally of the Soviet Union in the West Asia region negotiated with the State of Israel under the auspices of the US. Egypt even did not inform the Soviet Union about the peace settlement signed at Camp David on September 17, 1978. Soviet Union had also been excluded from the Egypt-Israel peace treaty signed in Washington on March 26, 1979. This treaty was also unilaterally witnessed by the US President Jimmy Carter.

These developments possessed a major setback for Soviet Union in the West Asia region. The main reason behind the Soviet exclusion from the peace settlement was probably the absence of the diplomatic relationship between Soviet Union and Israel. In the absence of diplomatic relationship, Soviet Union could not pursue the State of Israel to sign a peace agreement with Arab countries; even it could not invite the State of Israel for peace talks. Learning from the past experiences, the Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, worked to develop relations with the State of Israel in the post-cold war period. Moscow not only worked to improve its relationship with the State of Israel, it has also maintained its relations with the Arab countries.

The negotiation processes for peaceful settlement of Arab-Israeli dispute began in October 1991 in Madrid under the co-sponsorship of the Soviet Union and the US. This was the last West Asia peace process convened by the Soviet Union along with the US. Two months after the starting of Madrid Peace Conference, the Soviet Union dissolved. In the further meetings of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the Russian Federation took the seat of Soviet Union and played the role of mediator along with the US. The Russia under the Yeltsin presidency played minor role in the Arab-Israel peace process, though it was co-sponsor along with the US. The co-sponsorship implies equal seat with the partner, but Russia's role was secondary to the US. During the 1990s, Russia's secondary role may be blamed on its diminishing economy and upheaval in the domestic politics. The then Russian President Yeltsin was trying to revive the country's economy with the help of the US and also tried to consolidate its position in the domestic politics. In December 1999, President Yeltsin resigned from the President post and paved the way for Vladimir Putin to become acting president.

In May 2000, Vladimir Putin elected to the post of the Russian president. Vladimir Putin's accession to the power signaled a revival of Russia's great power status

in the world order. After assuming the power, President Putin worked to consolidate country's position at the international level. Russia under Putin presidency became ready to play a significant role in the West Asia peace process. Russia became the member of 'Quartet on the West Asia' along with the US, the EU, and the UN. These four major players of the world formed a group to look at the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The 'Quartet' members produced 'Roadmap' for peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian disputes. The Russian Federation as a member of the 'Quartet' played a significant role, sometimes bigger role than the US in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The State of Israel urged the Moscow to use its influence over the Arab countries to come to the negotiation table and find peaceful solutions to the Arab-Israeli disputes. Russia, unlike to the US, played as an independent broker in the West Asia affairs. Russia's friendly relations with Arab countries and its improving relations with the State of Israel provide it unique leverage vis-à-vis Arab-Israeli peace process.

The second factor that dominates the nature of Russia-Israel relationship is the presence of Russian-speaking Diaspora in the State of Israel. Nearly 20 percent populations of the State of Israel are Russian-speaking and who have emigrated from the former Soviet Republics. These Russian-speaking people form a natural bridge between the two countries. Basically, they entered in the State of Israel in two large waves. The first wave occurred in the 1970s when Leonid Brezhnev was the General Secretary of the CPSU. The Brezhnev era had undergone from contradictory phases. On the one hand, Soviet Union had severed its diplomatic relations with the State of Israel; on the other hand, Brezhnev leadership had allowed the emigration of Soviet Jews to the State of Israel. Actually, Brezhnev administration was sought trade benefits from the US and it wanted to please the US, not Israel. The second mass wave of Soviet emigration started in the 1989 and continued in the 1990s, added nearly one million populations in the demography of the State of Israel. The later wave of Soviet emigration included many engineers, scientists, and technicians those are giving their contribution to the development of the State of Israel. The second wave of emigration from Russia resulted in the form of big loss of human capital to Russia. These Russian immigrants in Israel influenced the culture of both countries. Many of them hold multiple passports and maintain multiple homes and languages. Both countries conduct cultural programs in

each other territory. Due to the presence of a large number of Russian-speaking people in Israel, Israeli education system changed drastically. The Israeli authorities started to conduct matriculation exams in Russian language and introduced 'Russian' as a second language in high-school courses. The government departments started to print booklets in Russian language, which was not allowed in the past. The Israeli media and news channels were also influenced by these Russian-speaking people. The 'Russian' character in Israeli films and TV serials became apparent frequently. Many TV channels in Israel conduct their program in Russian language.

These Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel also play a significant role in Israeli politics. They have formed their own parties such as Yisrael b'Aliya (IBA) and Yisrael Beiteinu (IB) and contested the elections. With six-seven seats in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), they influence the appointment of Israeli Prime Ministers. The role of Russian immigrants can be judge with the fact that all Prime Ministers of Israel, including the current one, Benjamin Netanyahu, are Russian-origin. Because of the influence of these Russian-origin prominent leaders, in my opinion, the relationships between Russia and Israel are on the way to improve. Even during the cold war period, Russia (then Soviet Union) - Israel relations were not deteriorated at the bitter end level. The Soviet Union had never questioned on the existence of the State of Israel.

However, these Russian immigrants in Israel proved to be the main opponent force of Arab-Israeli peace process. In order to settle the new immigrants from Russia and other countries, the Israeli government enhanced its settlement activities in the occupied territories. The mass immigration of Jewish people from Russia and other former Soviet Republics has become worrisome to the Palestinians and they feel suspicious about the future Palestine state. The Palestinians who are living in neighboring countries as refugees, losing hopes to return to their homeland. And those Palestinians living in the occupied territories fear that the mass immigration of Jewish people from Russia and other countries would force them to flee from the territory in the future. Those Russian-speaking communities have settled in the occupied territories refused to vacate it and opposing any concessions to the Palestinians. These Russian immigrants oppose any concessions to the Palestinians, thus, opposes the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Due to the mass arrival of Russian-speaking community to the State of Israel, the Russian Federation has also changed its attitudes towards Israel. Moscow, few days before to the disintegration of Soviet Union, supported a UNSC resolution that called for a reversal of 'Zionism is Racism' resolution. Since then, Moscow is improving its relationship with the State of Israel and performing as an independent mediator in the Arab-Israeli peace process unlike to the Soviet Union.

However, there are some issues that possess as obstacles to the Russia-Israel relationships. The Russian support to the Iranian nuclear program is a major concern for Israel since former Iranian President Ahmadinejad once stated the "Israel should be wiped off the map". Israel has raised her concern regarding the Iranian Nuclear Program and urged the international community to prevent Iran from acquiring the nuclear weapons. In response, Moscow has reiterated many times that Iran is pursuing nuclear program for the civilian purpose only. Iran is a signatory of NPT and it has right to pursue nuclear activities for civilian purpose. Nevertheless, Iran's undisclosed nuclear activities raise many questions among the international communities. In order to seek the solution of Iranian nuclear disputes, six major world powers namely the US, Russia, UK, China, France and Germany (commonly known as P5+1) came on single platform to look at the issue. A final agreement between Iran and six major powers signed in July 2015 that allowed Iran to pursue nuclear activities for civilian purpose only. However, the State of Israel is still suspicious about the Iran's nuclear activities.

The other factor that affects the Russia-Israel relationship is the close relationship between Israel and the US. Russia (then Soviet Union) has a long history of confrontation with the US during the cold war period. Although in the post-cold war period, the situation has been changed and both countries- Russia and the US have established a friendly relationship, the relationship reflected the shadow of cold war period too. On many issues, both countries have taken opposite sides. Although Russia's policy is not always destined to be odd relationship with the US, the Russia's great power ambitions compelled it to play active role in the world politics.

The Arab Spring that started in the last month of 2010 has provided an opportunity to Russia to play an active role in the West Asia. Russia is being actively

involved in the Syrian crisis since its beginning in March 2011. The diplomatic victory of Russia in the UN over Syrian crisis has upgraded its stature in the West Asia region. On the other hand, the diplomatic defeat of western countries especially of the US has diminished its influence in the West Asia region and world as well. Russian President Putin has actively protected the Assad regime of Syria. At the same time, Russia has also worked to prevent the rising of Islamist terrorism in Syria.

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