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## 'Economics not Politics': How India Built its Relations with Israel

While Nehru laid the foundation for the Indian Congress Party's anti-Israel stance, sections of the Hindu right and nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had striven to improve relations between Israel and India, after the party was established in the 1980s. Dr Subhir Sinha, an academic at the School of Oriental and African Studies, notes that the BJP's desire to build relations with Israel was fuelled by the "ideological affinity the Hindu right shared with the Zionist right".

"The Hindu right base looks to Israeli treatment of Palestine as a template for Kashmir," Sinha said, referring to the disputed territory of Kashmir which both India and Pakistan claim.

Critics of the Indian government have described Kashmir as being India's Palestine due to the policing tactics used in the disputed territory to govern the Muslim-majority population.

Sinha added that the sympathetic links between the Hindu right and the Zionist movement go as far back as the late 1970s.

### End of Cold War

But it was not the BJP and its ideological stance that led India to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992. It was pressure from the United States, according to Indian historian Vijay Prashad.

Faced with an economic crisis in 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union, its principal arms supplier, the Congress Party-led government had to rethink its foreign policy.

India at the time had asked for help from the International Monetary Fund and needed Washington's support to help save its economy and geopolitical interests.

Formalising full diplomatic relations with Israel was the "price demanded by Washington for India's foreign policy engagement with the US," senior Indian diplomats told Prashad in 2017.

"Washington, Israel's emissary, made it clear that there could be no real strategic partnership between India and the US if the former continued to hold adverse views on Israel," Prashad wrote in Al-Jazeera.

"India paid the price and established full diplomatic ties with Israel. Washington was satisfied."

### Finding an arms dealer

Despite its alliance with the US, which saw India receiving arms from Washington, this partnership was shortlived.

India conducted its second nuclear test in 1998, forcing America to stop its military assistance to India under the Glenn Amendment, which forbids the US from giving certain weapons to countries that acquire or transfer nuclear reprocessing technology outside of the sanctioned countries, agreed under non-proliferation treaties.

Modi and Netanyahu meeting Indian contingent of UN's Interim Force in Lebanon, at the World War I Indian Army cemetery in Haifa in June 2017

India was now forced to shop around for weapons, and Israel at this point had built the capability to produce US-standard weapons, after forming joint ventures with several arms companies in Europe and America.

India was, therefore, able to sidestep the Glenn Amendment and buy such US-standard weapons from Israel.

Since then, India has continued to be one of Israel's biggest customer for arms, a partnership that sees New Delhi buying more than half of Tel Aviv's weapons.

And after 25 years of formal diplomatic relations, trade between the two countries is now worth \$4.16bn, excluding defence spending, with Israel's key exports to India being diamonds, electronics, transport equipment, metals and precious stones.

### De-hyphenating relations

Although India sided with Palestine at the UN General Assembly in December 2017 and voted to condemn the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, Netanyahu refused to cancel his visit.

This vote was a departure from India's previous stance of generally abstaining from resolutions condemning Israel, including a 2014 UN Human Rights Council vote condemning Israel for its latest assault on Gaza. The Israeli premier is also expected to head to Mumbai to try and woo Bollywood's high and mighty in a bid to get them to film on location in Israel. He is also expected to meet with members of the Indian Jewish community and to visit a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi.

## Body of Disabled Gazan Exhumed for New Autopsy

**Amural of Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, who was shot dead by Israelis in December 2017, is painted on a wall in Gaza City.**



GAZA CITY: Palestinian officials exhumed the body of a disabled Gazan man as part of efforts to prove Israeli forces shot him in the head during recent protests and clashes.

"Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh's body was exhumed for another autopsy to refute Israeli claims that come as an attempt to evade their responsibility for this crime," said Mohammed Al-Najjal, the deputy justice minister in the Gaza Strip.

Najjal said the Palestinian authorities in Gaza decided that "in order to refute the occupation's claims, the bullet in his head must be presented to international parties," he added. He said "the results of this autopsy will be presented to international parties including the ICC (International Criminal Court)."

It was unclear whether a full autopsy had been performed on Abu Thurayeh after his death on Dec. 15 in the Palestinian enclave run by Hamas.

Israel's military said earlier it was opening an investigation into the death of the 29-year-old who, according to his family, had lost his legs in a 2008 Israeli strike.

Palestinian officials say the wheelchair-bound man was shot in the head by an Israeli sniper during protests and clashes along the Gaza border on Dec. 15.

The UN human rights chief said he was "truly shocked" by Abu Thurayeh's death and

demanding an "independent and impartial investigation."

Israel's announcement that it was opening a probe into his death came after the military previously said it was not able to determine whether he had been killed by its soldiers' fire.

The protest on Dec. 15 was part of unrest that has occurred in the Palestinian territories since US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Sixteen Palestinians have been killed since Trump's Dec. 6 announcement, most of them in clashes with Israeli forces.

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## Iran's Elites Are Far More Fragile Than They Look

Some reports have suggested that conservative politicians in Mashhad close to Ebrahim Raisi, the hard-line candidate who was defeated in the 2017 presidential election, organized the initial protests to challenge Rouhani's economic policies. From there, the demonstrations spiraled out of control.

Rouhani's recently unveiled budget has drawn much public attention for cutting back spending and criticizing institutionalized corruption. In order to attract foreign investment, Rouhani proposed to cut domestic spending on subsidies and increase fuel prices moves that could have sparked further discontent. The ever-frustrated Rouhani also drew attention to the large percentage of government funds that were allocated to religious and cultural institutions without any oversight, going so far as to name these organizations, as well as highlighting the \$8 billion allocated to the IRGC.

### Ahmadinejad's role in fanning the flames of popular discontent is also relevant.

Ahmadinejad's role in fanning the flames of popular discontent is also relevant. Whether he too was involved is not yet known, although IRGC officials have implied as much. Mohammad Ali Jafari, head of the IRGC, intimated that "This [protest] is linked to an individual who has opened his mouth in opposition to the values and principles of the system. Security officials are investigating this matter, to see if they see interference by this former official, certainly he will be confronted by law enforcement." Since the end of his presidential tenure, Ahmadinejad continues to be a thorn in the side of the regime, which has made every effort to marginalize him.

The Iranian leadership's response to the protests has been tepid at best and reflects the deep

political tensions and competition at the top of the government. President Rouhani has spoken twice since the protests, using the opportunity to set himself apart from his factional opponents. He acknowledged the root cause of the unrest being "distance from the younger generation" and called for regular access to the internet, government transparency, and the release of detained students. These are the same reforms that Rouhani has been calling for since 2013. It remains to be seen if he has the necessary political strength and courage to demand further change from his hard-line opponents. If he does not, he will ride out his remaining term as a lame duck president.

But it's important to note that reformists have also struggled to form a coherent response. As partners of the Rouhani government with many seats in parliament, they are in an awkward position of supporting the government and the rights of the protesters at the same time.

Meanwhile, Khamenei's comments have been limited to his usual game of blaming outsiders for their interference. The supreme leader continues to hold fast to a decaying vision of the Islamic Republic that has no meaning or value to many of the country's citizens; the blame for failing to keep the system in balance ultimately falls on his shoulders.

In 1858, at the Illinois Republican convention, then-senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln famously said, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The same can be said of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Without significant reconciliation among the elite and Iranian society at large, the Iranian government faces a perilous and volatile path ahead.

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## Who is Attacking Russia's Bases in Syria?

The attacks also raise questions about the sustainability of Russia's gains in Syria, said Jennifer Cafarella of the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War. In December, Putin visited the Hmeimim base and said Russia would start to wind its

presence down because the war in Syria is essentially over.

The events of recent days are a demonstration "that whoever conducted these attacks can still penetrate regime areas and impose costs on the Russians," she said. "The gains the regime has made are not secure and are at high risk of being temporary."

Perhaps the biggest question of all, however, is who was responsible. What makes the attacks especially unusual is that there has been no claim, triggering a frenzy of speculation in the Russian and Syrian news media over who may have carried them out.

Russia's Defense Ministry on Tuesday appeared to accuse the United States of supplying the technology for the drone attack, saying the assault required a higher level of expertise than any armed group in Syria is known to possess. Compounding the suspicions, the ministry said in a statement on its Facebook page that a U.S. Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft was in the skies above the area for four hours during the drone assault. Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon said the allegation was "absolutely false." The Islamic State has often used armed drones against U.S.-allied forces in eastern Syria and Iraq without "significant impact," he said, adding that small drones are readily available commercially.

But the nearest Islamic State positions are hundreds of miles from the western coastal province where Hmeimim is located, making the group one of the more unlikely culprits. Most of the Islamic State drones used against U.S. allies, moreover, had a range of no more than one to two kilometers, according to an analysis by the defense consultancy IHS Markit group. The Russian Defense Ministry statement said the drones used in the Hmeimim attack came from between 50 and 100 kilometers away, making them far more sophisticated and expanding the pool of potential suspects, the IHS analysis said.



**Russia's vast Khmeimim air base in northwestern Latakia province, the headquarters of Russia's military operations in Syria.**

One of the myriad Syrian opposition groups is the most probable suspect, Suchkov said. Russia has sent a letter to Turkish authorities urging them to comply with Turkey's obligations in the area under ceasefire agreements with Russia.

But that nonetheless leaves a question mark over which of the many groups was involved, because rebel groups typically claim all their operations. "If it was the opposition, they tend to put everything online and boast about it," Suchkov said. Among the theories circulating widely is that disgruntled Alawites from Assad's own minority sect were responsible. A statement about the attacks on the base, which is in a predominantly Alawite area, was posted online in the name of a shadowy group called the Free Alawite Movement. It warned Alawites who support the Syrian regime that the attacks proved Assad's hold on power is not secure, but did not explicitly claim that it carried out the attacks. A number of Alawite opposition members said they did not think the group is real and speculated that foreign intelligence agencies are seeking to create the impression of strife among regime loyalists.

Another claim made in Syrian opposition news outlets is that an Iranian-backed militia fighting on behalf of the regime and located in the government-controlled hills nearby was responsible. According to that theory, Iran wants to thwart Russia's efforts to impose a peace settlement on Syria that would undermine Iranian interests.

"There are so many theories," Suchkov said. "But it's a mystery at the moment." Suzan Haidamous and Louisa Loveluck in Beirut, Heba Habib in Stockholm and Zakaria Zakaria in Istanbul contributed to this report.

**The views expressed in all the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of AN-NOUR Newspaper**