



Asia's Rise: Implications for Israel and the Jewish People

1. China and India on the Way to Great Power Status

Since the early 1990s, a steady shift of global power has been in the making. It is the slowly accelerating transfer of power from West to East, particularly China and more recently and slowly India. Many observers agree today that this trend will transform both countries – certainly China and probably India – into great powers in less than a generation, with regional dominance and major continental or global influence, economically, politically and militarily.

Very few predicted the rise of China and India before and even after World War II. One of the few and most remarkable among them was Israel's founding father David Ben-Gurion. In 1963 he predicted with some anticipation that before long the two Asian states – China and India – would become the greatest powers in the world.

To this day quite a few Western and Russian commentators follow Asia's rise with an air of disbelief, dismay or disapproval. They have correctly assessed that both China and India still

face enormous internal and external challenges. Their long-term military and economic power, their ability to absorb great external shocks and their willingness to help protect global peace and the environment and project a meaningful message to the world are not at all guaranteed. In fact, both countries are likely to encounter major internal and external bumps in the road, but no country has ever become a great power without overcoming obstacles.

So far the doubters have been wrong and Ben-Gurion proved right. Of course he did not ignore that China, in his time, was enduring self-imposed isolation, foreign embargoes, political turmoil and ruinous economic experiments while India was stagnating politically and economically. But he was not impressed by the daily events. He tried to look further ahead and understand the deeper forces that were driving these oldest, surviving and proud civilizations. He knew that they remembered their great past and would struggle to reclaim their place in history, temporarily lost to the West. In fact this loss was very recent. In the 17th and 18th centuries, China was a great power, and India a very important power. Cultural and religious immobility

and an inability to incorporate modern science and technology, but also foreign intervention and internal strife then sapped their independence and economic strength. But the memory of a recent, more glorious past explains both China's and India's sense of identity and the strong "will to power," to use Nietzsche's term, that can be found in the elites of both countries and in large parts of their populations. In contrast, the "will to power" seems to have waned in Europe and it may be weakening in the United States.

2/3 of Asian countries oil imports come from the Middle East, and Asian dependence on the region will rise to 80% by 2030

2. Asia Moves into the Middle East

Asia's rise and its global implications are well-known and widely discussed. Much less known are the economic and geo-political implications for the Middle East. To the term 'Middle East' which they disregard as Eurocentric, Chinese and Indians prefer

the designation 'West Asia,' in accordance with the geographical proximity of the region to the Asian subcontinent and long-standing historical ties between the two sides. The growing relations observed today between Asia and the Middle East are revisiting and reinvigorating ancient ties. In the recent period, owing to the rise of China and India as global economic powers and to the remarkable growth of other Asian economies, links between Asia and the Middle East have expanded to an unprecedented extent.

Energy is the determinant driver of greater relations and interdependence between Asia and the Middle East in the 21st century, although it is not the only driver. Asian countries heavily depend on the continuous supply of energy to sustain their booming economies and growing populations and to alleviate energy poverty among the rural masses. The resulting surging demand in Asia for oil and gas, conjugated with the immense hydrocarbon resources of Mideast countries and the geographical proximity of the two regions, have made Asia and the Middle East close energy trade partners. Today, the Asia-Pacific region is the destination of over two-thirds of the Mideast producers' total petroleum exports. Conversely, no less than two-thirds of Asian countries' oil imports come from the Middle East, and most projections indicate that Asian import dependence on the region will rise to eighty percent by 2030.

Non-energy trade and investment constitute another significant driver of growing interdependence between the two regions, although to a lesser extent than the energy factor. Today about a third of the Middle East's total imports come from Asia, and over half of its non-energy exports are destined to Asia. Asia has thus become the Middle East's first export destination, far ahead of Europe and North America. Trade between the two regions is likely to continue expanding over the next decade, especially once the Gulf Cooperation Council concludes bilateral free trade agreements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China and India. Investment flows between the two regions are also expected to continue expanding. For Middle East investors, Asian countries, with their high and

sustained economic growth, cheap skilled workforce and dynamic markets, have become more attractive investment destinations than the West.

Human flows constitute the third major driver of increasing interdependence between the two regions. They include, first and foremost, the massive presence and continuing arrival of Asian workers in the Persian Gulf, who began migrating to the region after the 1973 oil price increase, gave rise to a massive investment program by Gulf oil producing states, resulting in growing demand for foreign labor. Today, the total population of Asian workers in the Persian Gulf is estimated at around 8.5 million, nearly half of them Indians. Asia and the Gulf countries are increasingly interdependent; the economy and society of several Gulf countries could no longer function without their Asian labor force.

Concurrently with the development of economic links, Asian countries have endeavored to advance mutual understanding and closer political and diplomatic cooperation with their western neighbors. Senior Asian government officials have stepped up official visits to Mideast countries over the last decade, and the governments of the two regions have signed major bilateral agreements in fields ranging from business development and education to the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Ensuring the safety of the Indian Ocean's sea-lanes is critical to both Asia and the Middle East because the bulk of oil and gas supplies as well as trade flow through these lanes. For the time being the safety of the sea lanes is protected by the US Navy, but Asian countries do not wish to depend completely

on the US. Therefore, Asian and Middle Eastern countries have greatly increased bilateral naval cooperation in recent years. India in particular, has undertaken on several occasions joint naval exercises with Persian Gulf states, including Iran, Oman and Qatar. Besides, reports have emerged recently that China might be considering setting up military bases and deploying forces in the Middle East over the next decade, as a means of protecting its access to strategic resources, especially oil, and substantial Chinese investments in the region.

Asia already has some form of military presence in the Middle East, as Asian states contribute personnel to the UN peacekeeping forces operating in the region. Today, no less than eight Asian-Pacific states (Bangladesh, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia and Nepal) contribute to the UNIFIL force operating on the Israel-Lebanon border, providing over 5,000 peacekeepers out of a total of about 12,000. China likes to show its contingent in Southern Lebanon on Chinese domestic television, perhaps with the double aim of demonstrating China's contribution to world peace but also of making the Chinese people familiar with the Chinese army's presence in remote countries.

Asia's economic, military and diplomatic clout in the Middle East has increased considerably in

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recent years, and Asia's strategic footprint in the Middle East is likely to grow stronger. Looking at this trend, various long-term scenarios are possible depending on whether the current reduction of America's commitments and military presence in the Middle East turns out to be permanent, or whether America will again project its power into the Middle East in order to compete with Asia for control of the region's precious energy resources. In the first case, it does not take an

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exuberant fantasy to imagine a very different Middle East in twenty or thirty years. The West's military presence and its capacity, or will, to intervene might then be a thing of the past, its economic influence greatly reduced and its political power to affect events non-existent in the case of a disunited Europe and declining in the case of the United States. In

that case China's and India's need to protect their vital energy imports, their immense investments and their millions of citizens working in the region will draw them into the Middle East both politically and militarily, whether they like it or not. The safety and stability of the oil-producing Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, will be a national security priority for both China and India. This might change again but only if and when new pervasive energy technologies or major new oil producers outside the Middle East emerge, and this could take another ten to twenty years.

3. The Stakes in Asia are High

For Israel and the Jewish people the stakes in Asia are high. Sixty years ago, and within no more than twenty-six months, three of the world's oldest living civilizations went through extreme changes: India reclaimed its independence and statehood in 1947, Israel did so in 1948, and the new Communist China came to be in 1949, after many years of civil strife and a partial conquest by Japan. All three had strong cultural roots and similar historic claims. The leaders of India and China, Gandhi, Nehru, and Mao Zedong, were absorbed by their national struggles and not interested in similarities with others. For India and China, the emergence of tiny Israel was irrelevant. However, for Israel the re-emergence of these two great Asian civilizations was potentially of enormous consequence.

Both China and India carry no negative historic and religious baggage with regard to Jews, in contrast to the Western and Islamic worlds. They knew no indigenous anti-Semitism, and when anti-Jewish or anti-Zionist statements were made in the 20th century, they were imports from the West, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, the Muslim world or Japan. The absence of age-old prejudices in the main Asian nations could offer Israel and the Jews new opportunities, even if these nations are not always aware of the contributions of Judaic civilization. The most obvious of these opportunities, and the best known, are economic. Israel, like all export-oriented countries, and Jewish businessmen all over the world, benefit from Asia's rapid economic growth. Many Jews and Israelis report that they are well received and respected in Asia, particularly in

China. But there is perhaps another, less material advantage, more valuable for Israel than for any other country. Whether the Arab-Israeli conflict is solved or at least greatly reduced and stabilized in twenty or thirty years, or even if the confrontation continues, Israel may draw a long-term existential benefit from a newly powerful Asia that has no history of hostility to Jews – as long as Israel's conflict with its direct neighbors does not threaten vital Asian interests in the oil-producing Gulf countries.

In comparison to the West, China and India relate differently not only to Jews, but also to Islam and the Middle East, and this too could have positive consequences for Israel, as will be shown later. If Middle Eastern countries have increasingly to rely on Asia's giants for long-term protection they will also tend to listen to these giants.

For the time being, and despite a noticeable improvement of bilateral relations with Israel since the early 1990s, Asian voting records and speeches at the United Nations – especially at the General Assembly – on issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict remain resolutely in favor of the Arab states. This pattern results to a large extent from the concerns of Asian states not to impair close ties and strategic interests with the Arab world, rather than real interest in or concern with the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, notwithstanding their participation in UN peacekeeping forces in the Middle East, there is little evidence at the moment that Asian states aspire to play a central role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy or in other Middle Eastern issues.

However, this could change in the next decades. It is likely that China's and India's aspirations to global power status will lead them to seek greater influence and responsibility in resolving conflicts and challenges in the Middle East. China's activism in the UN Security Council on the Iranian nuclear issue is notorious. Although it has voted in favor of a number of Security Council resolutions sanctioning Iran, China has also consistently worked to water them down and has succeeded to do so on several occasions.

In private, the language of China and India towards Israel is more understanding than in public. When they established diplomatic, economic and even military relations with Israel they signaled that they regarded Israel's presence in the Middle East as legitimate and permanent. They have repeated this position in

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various, quiet ways, particularly in their discussions with Iran. Chinese representatives informed Jewish and Israeli contacts that they have conveyed to Iran their country's disapproval of the threats Iran's leaders routinely utter against Israel. There is a considerable reservoir of interest and sympathy for Israel and the Jewish people among some of Asia's, particularly China's, elites and in segments of the general public, although this sympathy does not often find public political expression. But China's and India's growing power could lead

them to express their views more explicitly and assume a much more active role in stabilizing a future Middle East. Friendly relations with Israel, in parallel to friendly relations with the Muslim states, could also become a subtle way for China and India to convey to their partners that great powers decide their own policies and do not depend on

An Indian Minister: "Great powers decide their own policies and do not depend on outsiders, not even their oil suppliers"

outsiders, not even their oil suppliers. During the years when the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, governed India, a government member once gave this reply when he was asked at a press conference how his country could afford to improve its relations with Israel when it depended so much on Arab oil.

4. China, the Jewish People and Israel

Small Jewish communities, the best known one in Kaifeng, lived in imperial China for centuries without encountering any hostility. In the 20th century close to thirty thousand European Jews found refuge and safe haven in Shanghai and Harbin. Chinese intellectuals became aware of a world-wide Jewish people only in the late 19th century, and also learned that this people was often mistreated.

A feeling of affinity partly based on shared suffering has played a certain role in the relations between China and the Jews and Israel. In 1920, Sun Yatsen, the greatly respected founder and first president

of the Chinese Republic, endorsed the Zionist program and praised the Jewish contribution to world civilization.

No negative references to Judaism or Zionism can be found in the early statements of Mao Zedong. In January 1950 Israel became the first country in the Middle East to recognize the People's Republic of China, which some Chinese still remember. During the Korean War (1950-53) the United States demanded that Israel cease all contacts with China. This was the first episode in an unending history of tensions between the United States and Israel caused by policy divergences regarding China. From then on until the end of the Mao era (1976), China pursued a policy of strident public hostility to Israel, though Mao Zedong told Henry Kissinger in 1974 that he felt no antipathy toward Jews, on the contrary, and that he also encouraged all American steps to stop Soviet expansionism in the Middle East – which implicitly meant military support for Israel. In 1978-79, long before China and Israel established diplomatic relations, a secret military relationship developed between the two countries, both of which were under serious Soviet military threat. Israel shipped large quantities of weapons to China after it had performed poorly in a military confrontation with Vietnam, a Soviet ally.

In 1992, and in a complete break with the past, China established diplomatic relations with Israel. There were many reasons for this change. One was Chinese appreciation of the influence of the American Jewish community, and the hope that Jews might have some understanding for China and help ease the always- difficult relations between

China and the United States. High-level bilateral visits followed at a brisk pace, and economic, agricultural and military links grew. Reports began to appear in the Chinese media describing Israel's achievements, for example in agriculture, with obvious sympathy, and several Chinese universities started or expanded study programs on Jewish and Israeli history and civilization.

5. The Intervention of the United States

The relations between Israel and China came to a precipitous halt in 2000 when massive American pressure forced Israel to break a legally binding contract to sell China an Israeli-developed airborne early warning system, the Phalcon. The deal was six years old, not a secret to anybody, and nearly completed. This provoked the most serious crisis in Sino-Israeli relations thus far. In 2004 a similar incident occurred, though on a smaller scale, when the United States forced Israel to renege on the overhaul of Israeli-made aerial drones China had sent back, again in line with a legally binding contract. No American components were involved in any of these Israeli technologies. The American explanation was that these systems could affect the military balance in the Far East. China, of course, found other ways to satisfy its needs, and its anger with Israel dissipated after a few years. Relations with China are growing again in nearly all fields, but Israel is now obliged to ask for US approval of all high-tech exports to China, whether military or not – a constraint that has not been imposed on any other sovereign country. The end effect of

these American induced crises is that Israel's value to China has been greatly reduced. Until 2000 Israel was an important, highly respected country for China, a strategic player, probably one of the twenty most important countries. It has dropped from this list. China is likely to regard Israel now as an American vassal of dubious reliability. The net advantage that America added to its global geo-strategic position by prohibiting Israeli military sales to China was very small. But the damage that Israel suffered in its long-term, global geo-strategic position is substantial. The Chinese never believed that Israel was in serious existential danger. They have even less incentive now to take into account Israel's concerns, particularly in regard to the Iranian danger.

U.S. capacity to exert pressure on Israel has reduced significantly the value of Israel to China

Israel had no choice in this matter. America's political and military support is indispensable to Israel and preserving the close links between the two nations must override many other considerations; nothing that China could say or do today could replace even a part of America's support. America's intention was not to harm Israel, but it was indifferent to Israel's long-term strategic needs in Asia because it viewed Israel's future only in the Middle Eastern context.

American concerns about Israeli defense links with China were most certainly genuine though for much more complex reasons than those officially given. China's emergence as an economic powerhouse

has created a new, unusual situation with which the United States does not yet know how to cope. In China, the United States faces for the first time in its modern history a big challenger that draws its primary strength not from military power as Nazi Germany, imperialist Japan and the Soviet Union did, but from many of the same virtues that have made America powerful: the hard work of a large, diligent population, infrastructure expansion and technology, large foreign investments, and

China Feels Threatened by the chain of American military bases surrounding it and by the U.S. support of Taiwan

international trade and currency interventions. But America still tends to look at the Chinese challenge from a military angle and reacts by strengthening its own military posture and its defense and other links with China's neighbors, in pursuits of traditional geo-strategic principles. The Chinese in turn feel threatened by the

United States, particularly by the string of military bases surrounding China and by American support for Taiwan, and they seek countervailing powers. This is one of the main reasons why China wants to maintain good relations with Iran and opposes really effective, biting sanctions against it: Iran is America's most resolute opponent; it is its "Achilles heel" and poses the most comprehensive threat to America's strategic interests in the Middle East and beyond. China cannot and does not wish to challenge American military power in the Far East by direct means. Therefore, the Chinese sometimes react to what they regard as American provocation

in the Far East by squeezing America's "Achilles heel" in the Middle East. Some Chinese actions in the Middle East were "tit-for-tat" policies, for example when China, more than ten years ago, sold Iran anti-ship missiles after the United States had approved new weapons sales to Taiwan, or in October 2010 when China participated in aerial maneuvers with the Turkish air-force over Turkish territory shortly after it had protested against joint American-South Korean maneuvers in the Far East near Chinese territory.

Iran's energy resources are important, but Western commentators who believe that they are the only reason for China's opposition to Western demands of Iran are mistaken. In the last few years China has carried out a fast and massive policy reversal to reduce its energy dependence on Iran. Two or more years ago approximately fourteen percent of China's energy imports came from Iran. Today it is only approximately five to six percent. There could be no clearer indication that oil imports are not the only, and perhaps not even the main reason for Chinese links with Iran.

To sum up, Israel paid a double price as a result of the Sino-American rivalry. It had to cut its strategic defense links with China, and it has to face Iranian threats the world has failed to curb so far, partly because of Chinese opposition. That said, it is not certain that the strong military links between China and Israel would have continued or expanded for many more years. China or Israel might have had reasons to reduce their military links, but this did not have to occur in 2000, and not through a humiliating public rupture and breach of contract that damaged the interests of both countries.

6. India, the Jewish People and Israel

Jewish communities have lived and flourished in various parts of India for probably two thousand years. India and China are the only civilizations where Jews lived for centuries without encountering any hostility from the native population. The founding fathers of modern India, Gandhi and Nehru, knew that Jews had often been persecuted in other parts of the world, but in stark contrast to China's Sun Yatsen, they rejected the Jews' right of return to their ancient homeland to become again a sovereign nation. In 1921, one year after Sun Yatsen applauded the Zionist program, Gandhi rejected it: "The Jews cannot receive sovereign rights in a place which has been held for centuries by Muslim powers by right of religious conquest." The hostility maintained by India toward the Jewish state during the entire Cold War period was not merely the result of Gandhi's and Nehru's ideological opposition to Zionism. It sprang from durable national interests and constraints, in particular those related to India's close links with the Soviet Union and with the Muslim world, as well as from India's concern about its own sizeable Muslim domestic population. India and Israel established full diplomatic ties in January 1992, just a few days after China normalized its relations with Israel.

The imperative for India to build sound relations with the US, the sole superpower in the new international system, was one of the key factors – if not the most determinant – that pushed India toward normalization with Israel. India, just like

China in the same years, came to believe that improving relations with Israel would not only enhance India's standing vis-à-vis the American Jewish community, but also, in turn, help advance links with the US. The Indians, like the Chinese, were and are still convinced that the American Jewish lobby has major influence on the foreign policy decisions of Washington. This perception was also the result of the active diplomacy engaged early on by several American Jewish organizations, for example the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and B'nai B'rith International, to promote links between India and Israel, including valuable support provided to the formation of an Indian lobby in the US. The joint cooperation between American Jewish and Indian lobbies played a role in obtaining the Bush administration's approval for Israel's sale of the Phalcon aerial reconnaissance plane to India – probably seen by the Americans as part of their response to a perceived "Chinese threat." The Jewish and Israeli lobby in the US has also worked actively for congressional support of the US-India civilian nuclear agreement, a bilateral accord on full civil nuclear cooperation approved in 2008.

As in the case of China, Israel's military link with India, including cooperation between air forces, was the beginning, and for a long time, the

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core of the Indo-Israeli relationship. Since 1992, Indian purchases of Israeli weapons systems and technologies have considerably increased, and in early 2009, Israel overtook Russia as India's first military supplier. Indo-Israeli military cooperation has gone far beyond a buyer-supplier relationship, with major joint research and development ventures initiated by Indian and Israeli defense firms, and extensive bilateral cooperation in intelligence and counter-terrorism.

Indo-Israeli military cooperation encompasses joint R&D ventures and extensive bilateral cooperation in intelligence and counter-terrorism

However, numerous constraints continue to weigh on the development of Indo-Israeli ties, from issues of bureaucracy and claims of corruption to dissimilarities in business culture and competition from foreign companies. The United States regard Israel's defense and security cooperation with India as positive, in contrast to its hostility to Israel's past military links with China.

Nevertheless, according to some reports, there is American opposition to some planned arms deals between India and Israel. The United States may see the military cooperation between India and Israel as a means to balance China's rise in Asia. This is still far from a tri-partite strategic alliance against China. India remains deeply allergic to any idea of being used by one great power against another major power, and the very last thing Israel wishes is to see its relations with China further damaged by appearing as a

pawn in a global anti-Chinese strategy orchestrated by the United States.

The strong hostility of the Indian left to close ties with the Jewish state (especially in the military sphere) has been perceived as potentially threatening to Indo-Israeli cooperation. And yet, the Indian left has not succeeded in bringing about any far-reaching changes in India's Israel policy, and its political weight has significantly decreased since the last 2009 Indian general elections. However, the Indian left's posture on Israel continues to permeate the views of the Indian intellectual elites, which have very little knowledge of Israel or Judaism, if any. This is a major problem that a much broader Jewish and Israeli cultural policy in India should try to address. A considerable part of the Indian intelligentsia has bought the one-sided Arab narrative of the expulsion of the Palestinians by Israel, but chooses to ignore the flight and expulsion of nearly all Jews from Arab lands. Still, the sympathy conveyed to the Palestinians does not express itself in hostility to or criticism of Jews in general, including the large majority of Indian Jews who left for Israel. And even Israel's most vocal critics do not call for its elimination, as is the case in some radical leftist circles in the West. In India, in contrast particularly to Europe, new anti-Zionism is not the bastard child of old anti-Semitism, and therefore it might be easier to modify. Weighing more significantly on India's Israel policy are India's sizeable Muslim population and its close ties with the Arab and Muslim world, as we shall show in the following sub-chapter.

Indian ties with Iran present a challenge to US and Israeli interests. It is true that in accordance

with its consistent support for the principle of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the Indian government opposes Iran's nuclear program and voted in favor of UN resolutions sanctioning Tehran. Yet, a series of strategic interests makes India unwilling to sever ties with Iran. As in the case of China, Iran is an important supplier of oil and gas to India, but even more than for China, this is not the only reason for India's close links with Iran. In early 2003, India and Iran signed a declaration proclaiming a "strategic partnership" between the two countries. Only two months later, for the first time, India and Iran conducted joint naval exercises in the Persian Gulf. Military ties between the two countries have since expanded, including India's training of Iranian military personnel, bilateral exchanges of defense and intelligence officials and, according to reports, minor Indian weapons sales to Iran.

India's rapprochement with Iran largely relates to India's acute concern with neighboring Pakistan. The deepening of Indo-Iranian ties serves as a powerful counterweight to Pakistan and to the upsurge in Sunni Islamic extremist groups throughout South Asia. To a certain extent, by moving closer to Iran the Indian leadership has also sought to express India's resentment that the US has never fully supported it against Pakistan and has even developed close security ties with Islamabad. The US forces are set to begin withdrawing from Afghanistan in July 2011, and India fears that the "Af-Pak mess" – as some Indians call the interrelated troubles in Afghanistan and Pakistan – will worsen after this withdrawal. If this is the case, India is likely to move even closer to Iran particularly as Iran's past relations with a

Taliban-ruled Afghanistan were very bad, and its relations with Pakistan not good either. Although India is very aware of Israeli and US concerns about Iran, its own national security concerns are more compelling as could be expected.

7. The Trouble with Islam

It is useful to reflect on the historic origin of Jewish, Indian and Chinese relations with Islam because this origin can still explain current problems. When the waves of Arab horsemen streamed out of the Arabian Peninsula to conquer the world, they changed history profoundly, not least the history of the Jewish people, India and China. In the 7th century, almost the entire Middle East and North Africa, where more than ninety percent of all Jews lived, fell under Arab domination. During the same years the Arabs conquered and Islamized for the first time an important province of India which was followed by centuries of Muslim invasions. A century later, in 751, an Arab army defeated and destroyed the Chinese army in present-day Kirgizstan which led to the collapse of Chinese rule in Central Asia and the Islamization of this vast region. In the following centuries Arabs and Central Asian Muslims kept immigrating to China.

India's rapprochement with Iran is seen by India as a powerful counterweight to Pakistan and the upsurge of Sunni extremist groups through South Asia

Thus, there is a certain historic commonality between Jews, Indians and Chinese which has rarely been noticed. The Arabs defeated or occupied all three in the same early centuries and hence, Islam has become a part of their own history and not only an external threat as in the case of Europe.

The precise impact of Islam varied greatly between these nations. India's Muslims represent fifteen to twenty percent of its total population. India has found a stable and mostly peaceful modus vivendi

Chinese experts and officials admit privately that they regard Islam as China's biggest internal threat

between all its religions, but the trouble with Indian Kashmir and the uncertain political future of Pakistan remain sources of deep concern.

In China, the Muslim presence was for many centuries unproblematic and had virtually no impact on Chinese civilization. This

changed in the mid- and late 18th century when there were violent, severely suppressed Muslim rebellions against Chinese rule, repeated in several parts of China in the 19th century. Today Muslims represent only two to three percent of the total population, but many of them are Turkic speaking Uyghurs who live in China's largest, strategically important province that shares a common border with Muslim Central Asia and Pakistan. The incidents that occurred in this region not long ago show that China has trouble with Muslim Uyghur nationalism and separatism. Saudi Arabia and perhaps other oil exporters use their enormous financial resources to build new mosques all over

China and finance Arab and Muslim libraries, when possible also in China's universities. In fact, some Chinese experts and officials view these activities with great unease, are not sure how to cope with them and admit privately that they regard Islam as China's biggest internal threat. In public the issue is considered to be too delicate to be mentioned.

Thus, the trouble with Islam has affected and continues to affect the relations between the Jews, Israel, India and China. From the time of the Balfour Declaration, Asian nations have looked at Zionist and Israeli aspirations with an eye on their Muslim minorities and sometimes on other Muslim nations – for reasons of “realpolitik” only. China supported Zionism in the early 1920s, but in 1947 yielded to internal Muslim and foreign Arab pressure and abstained in the United Nations' vote to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The leaders of India were from the 1920s to 1992 entirely hostile to Zionism and Israel, in deference to Muslim and Arab wishes. In 1947 India was the only democratic country that voted with all Muslim countries against the UN resolution.

Widely spread among the Indian political establishment was, and partly still is, a perception that India has to be careful when dealing with Israel, lest the parties in power lose Muslim votes and the country jeopardizes its strategic interests in Arab and Muslim states. It must also be said, however, that this argument lost some of its credibility when it became clear to India in the early 1990s that even its most enthusiastic support for Arab causes did not, and will not affect Arab support for their sister-Muslim country, Pakistan, whenever it clashes with

India. The argument became even weaker when the bulk of India's Muslims barely reacted to the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel. There were a few protests but no major violence. Today however, there are new fears that a segment of India's Muslim population could be drawn to Muslim fundamentalism and terrorism coming from outside India, and that a too visible and cordial relationship with Israel could hasten such developments.

The trouble and concern with Islam can still be a dominant factor disturbing, delaying or preventing the development of closer, publicly visible ties between Israel and Asia's main nations. On the other hand, many in China and India, including particularly their defense establishments, also recognize that they share a common enemy with Israel, namely Muslim extremism and terrorism. They appreciate Israel's competence and success in fighting these threats as well as Israel's military power and defense technologies. In fact, there is close, but mostly secret cooperation between Israel and both India and China to prevent and combat Muslim terrorism. The current situation is fluid and the future wide open. Repeated and growing Muslim violence in India or China would certainly enrage public opinion in these countries as it did in India after the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. It could push both countries into closer cooperation with Israel. For the time being, due to the trouble with Islam, Israel gains something but loses more. Currently the balance for Israel seems negative. This situation is unlikely to change soon and in major ways unless there is a lasting breakthrough in the Middle East peace process.

In the very long term, the situation might be less negative for Israel because there are additional elements in this complex equation. It was said earlier that in comparison to the West, China and India relate differently not only to Jews, but to Muslims as well and that this could be a long-term advantage to Israel and the Jewish people. This difference is the direct outcome of the early history mentioned at the beginning of this sub-chapter. China and India never invaded the Middle East, but were once invaded by Arabs. The Asian giants have no colonial past in the Middle East, and thus, Arabs and Iranians do not have the same resentment against them they harbor against the West. Conversely, China and India harbor no guilt feelings with regard to the Muslim world. They may have tensions with their own Muslims, and these have in fact already gotten in the way of their relations with Israel, but these tensions have had, in the last years, no known negative effects on their links with the Arabs and Iranians. During the 1992 communal riots in Ahmedabad, India, two thousand Muslims were killed, and during the violence between Han Chinese and Muslims in Urumqi in China in 2009 hundreds of people were killed or injured, and afterwards more than ten Muslim rioters were sentenced to death and executed. None of these events triggered particular protests in Arab countries or Iran, and did not threaten links between the two Asian giants and the Middle East. This is very interesting because it

**The 2008
Islamic terrorist
attacks in
Mumbai
enraged the
public opinion
in India**

indicates a different kind of relationship compared to that between the West and the Muslim world. China and India want the best possible relations with the Muslim world, but have less need than the West to appease Arab, Iranian or other Muslim grievances at the expense of others. Moreover, the “Holy Places” of Christians, Muslims and Jews are of no interest to their majorities.

As much as China and India seek friendly relations with the nations of the Middle East, the latter want

The Jewish and Israeli mind-set of the 20th Century was almost exclusively focused on Europe and America, and ignored Asia

and need such relations even more. They listen to, and are likely to consult more and more with China and India. The need of Middle Eastern regimes for steady, long-term friends who want stability in this critical region, in addition to or in replacement of the West, is likely to strengthen.

In the meantime, Israel and the Jewish people have various means to influence Asian policies and reduce or neutralize Muslim hostility. One is to seek and strengthen friendly contacts with the Muslims of these countries, invite them to Israel and better inform them about the realities of Israel and the Middle East. Israel is actively pursuing this policy already with the Muslims of India. Another way is to make the main Diaspora communities more aware of the growing importance of Asia for Israel. The aim is to mobilize their cooperation in explaining to China and India that they may have something to gain in the wider world when they do not yield to pressures against Israel.

8. Jewish and Israeli Outreach to Asia: The Need for a Long-Term Vision

If Israel and the Jewish people want to ensure that Asia’s growing power in the Middle East will have more positive than negative effects for Israel in the long term, they must become more proactive in Asia now, without expecting, as they usually do, quick political or economic dividends. If there is a dividend it will come only in the longer term and as result of greater Jewish and Israeli attention to Asia, a better understanding of Jewish and Israeli history by Asia’s elites, and of more regular and sustained Jewish and Israeli efforts to contact and befriend Asia’s future leaders. Also, the Jewish people and Israel must offer Asia more than common memories of past struggles or solidarity against common enemies, and they are able to offer more, particularly in the fields of science and technology.

The Jewish and Israeli mind-set of the 20th century was almost exclusively focused on Europe and America and ignored Asia. There were objective reasons for this: the strong Jewish communities in the West compared to the minuscule number of Jews in the main Asian countries, and the overriding importance of Israel’s political, economic and military links with the West compared to the support that Asian countries have given to Israel’s enemies over many years. But there is also a deeper problem with the dominant Jewish and Israeli perceptions of the world. The Israeli Asia scholar Prof. Yitzhak Shichor paraphrased this perception gap by inverting a poem of the 12th century

Spanish Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi. The poet's famous "Zionist" line says "My heart is in the East [Israel] but I live in the far West [Spain]." In contrast, the Jewish and Israeli lament has for too long been the opposite: "My heart is in the West and I live [unfortunately] in the East!" Until the late 1980s the Jewish people and Israel barely understood Asia and with some exceptions, did not try to reach out to the continent. The exhortations of Ben-Gurion mentioned at the beginning had long been forgotten, except by a small number of exceptional, dedicated Israeli diplomats who nearly all came from the defense establishment and not from the ranks of Israel's Foreign Ministry which was then completely oriented towards the West. Apart from the defense establishment's secret links with China and India before the establishment of diplomatic relations, Asia was completely marginal to Jewish and Israeli consciousness.

Since China and India established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, more Jews and Israelis have begun to show interest in Asia. Political and other relations began to grow, tourism to Asia expanded, books and articles about Asian countries have appeared more frequently and Asian restaurants have opened in Israel. Israeli youth keep visiting Asia in large numbers, particularly India and Nepal. Today, Jewish and Israeli politicians are very aware of Asia's importance, and Israel's diplomatic representations in China and India have grown larger. Also, business enterprises, non-governmental organizations and individuals are reinforcing links with China or India, and the number of Israeli students who study Asian languages, mainly Mandarin Chinese, or Asian

history and economic development is growing year by year.

Yet in many other contexts the old mind-set has not disappeared, and Asia remains marginal. Jewish and Israeli media give little time and space to Asian affairs. Asia has never been important enough for Israel's media to send permanent correspondents to the continent, in contrast to the Israeli and Jewish media presence in the West. The great American Jewish fiction writers of the 20th century and their Israeli colleagues who are known across the world, including in China and India, have written many famous novels, but none with an Asian theme or background, as far as we could ascertain, with only one exception. It is A.B. Yehoshua's *Return from India* (in the English translation, *Open Heart*). Another sign of Asia's marginality appeared at the opening of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in summer 2010, after many years of repairs. The only section not yet completed was the Asian art wing. Art is the most accessible and attractive way to connect with remote but important civilizations, and this is why many art museums of the West are currently refurbishing, exhibiting and enriching their Asian art collections – but not so Israel. In general, the Israeli public has very few opportunities to become familiar inside Israel with Chinese, Indian or other Asian cultures, be it the visual arts, literature, music, theater, film or dance.

The Jewish people and Israel need a long-term vision of their relationship with Asia's rising powers

Asian understanding of Israel and the Jewish people, and knowledge of their history, culture and religion, is equally limited, in spite of considerable interest that can be found in many places. The ignorance is particularly noticeable in India although Indians have unlimited access to information. But while Asia can afford to be ignorant of Israel and the Jews, the latter cannot afford to be ignorant of Asia. What they need is a long-term vision of their relationship with Asia's rising powers. This vision should underpin a large, sustained and more generously funded outreach to Asia, focusing on cultural policies and information exchanges, science and technology policy, Judaism and Israel studies in Asia, Asian studies in Israel and more. Israel can and should not do this alone, the Jewish people across the world has to participate in this effort. It will take time because long years of mutual neglect cannot be overcome quickly. Also, it is clear that politics and national interests will ultimately be the main drivers of Chinese and Indian policies, but this does not mean that Israel and the Jewish people cannot do more to affect these policies.

The relative Jewish and Israeli neglect of Asia, and their fixation on America and Europe has an additional reason not mentioned above. Asia is the future, and Jews and Israelis have rarely been able to think of, or prepare for a long-term future. They plan for the next day, the next year, as if there is no long-term future. Asia is a test. Can the Jews and Israel this time, envisage and prepare for the long term?