

# Israeli Inroads into Asia Undermine Asian Ties with The Arab World

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*Israel has carved economic inroads into Asia deep enough to compromise the traditional Asian political support for Arabs. If this trend continues, the growing economic Israeli-Asian relations could in no time translate into political ties that would neutralize Asia in the Arab-Israeli conflict.*

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's official visit to Japan from May 11-15 is not an historic breakthrough per se in bilateral relations that date back to 1952.

Neither is the normalization of relations in "a matter of weeks" between Israel and Turkey, which was the first major Muslim country to recognize the State of Israel in 1949, as promised by the Turkish premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan on last April 27.

However both events should highlight the historic breakthrough Israel has discreetly and quietly achieved in pivoting to Asia, once an Arab reservoir of support in their conflict with Israel over Palestine .

"For the first time, in 2014, [Israeli exports with Asia will exceed trade with the US](#), pushing it from second to third place (behind the EU)," director of the Foreign Trade Administration at Israel's Ministry of the Economy, Ohad Cohen, was quoted as saying by Israeli "Globes" on April 27.

While opening more trade attaché offices in Asia, the Israeli Ministry of the Economy has closed a number of European trade offices in Austria , Hungary , Finland and Sweden "in order to [refocus on emerging markets](#)," Cohen explained.

"Today we have five offices in China , three in India , and we have added attaché in Vietnam and an office in Manila ," he added.

US President Barak Obama was in Asia last April trying to demonstrate that his promised Asian strategic shift was at last real. Meanwhile, the Israelis were already secured in their strategic shift to Asia .

While Obama was trying to forge a US-Asian counterbalance to China in what Chinese commentators described as "Cold War mentality," Israel was courting the emerging Chinese economic superpower as well as India, which the World Bank on last April 29 reported it had overtaken Japan as the world's third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity.

"'Pivot to Asia' is a term that might be applied to Israel ," [Roger Cohen](#) wrote in The New York Times on April 24, citing a boom in its trade with China to more than \$8 billion in 2013. Israel 's military and technological cooperation with China had once created a crisis in the

U.S. – Israeli relations.

Cohen noted that while the US and Europe continue to “huff and puff” about the illegal Israeli colonial settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank “ Asia does business. India has already bought sea-to-sea missiles, radar for a missile-intercept system and communications equipment from Israel .”

### **India a case study**

India could be a case study of Israel ’s historic breakthrough.

According to the web site of the embassy of India in Cairo, Egypt, “Much of our external trade passes along the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden,” all almost exclusively Arab sea routes, and “Our total bilateral trade with the Arab countries is over US\$ 110 billion and the region is home to 4.5 million Indians and caters to 70% of our energy imports.”

Indian Defence Minister Shri A.K. Antony told the 15th Asian Security Conference in February last year that “West Asia is a critical region” for India and the “Gulf region is vital for India’s energy security.”

During 2011 to 2012, India’s trade with the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was more than U.S. \$145 billion (with exports and imports from the region standing at 20 percent and 14 percent, respectively), Antony said.

The “links” with West Asia “have got deepened and further strengthened in the era of globalization.” Former Prime Minister of India ’s Special Envoy to West Asia, Chinmaya R. Gharikhan, was on record to attribute the Indian economy growth at more than 8% to India ’s “dependence” for 70% of its energy needs on West Asia .

Former Indian ambassador to Oman , UAE and Saudi Arabia , Talmiz Ahmad, on last December 29, wrote in Deccan Chronicle:

“The security and stability of the Gulf and West Asia are crucial for the long-term interests of the Asian countries. This calls for a review of the Asian security role in the Gulf.”

Yet, despite these vital Indian – Arab relations, India is now the largest customer of the military equipment, the largest military partner and the largest Asian economic partner of Arabs’ arch enemy, Israel .

Such Indian and Chinese exchanges with Israel have neutralized Asian pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian influence or at least created a contradiction between Asia ’s economic dealings and its verbal political speech.

These Asian-Israeli exchanges deprived Israel of an influential incentive for making peace. They should have been at least postponed as an Asian prize for ending the Israeli military occupation of Arab lands in Palestine , Syria and Lebanon .

Until peace is made with Arabs and Palestinians in particular, Israel will continue to be the main destabilizing factor in the region.

Even then, it will continue to consider itself an integral part of western culture and strategy and to be a western influence doing its best to make the region a free market for western interests and a strategic monopoly of western powers.

Adding to the US empowerment of the Hebrew state by bolstering its strategic power will only bolster a formidable obstacle to peace in the region.

### **Controversial explanation**

Writing in Forbes on May 14 last year, professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver , Jonathan Adelman, and the acting executive director for Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), Asaf Romirowsky, had a controversial explanation of Israel 's breakthrough in Asia :

Historically, "Asia largely lacks the anti-Semitism that was so prominent in Europe" and " Israel was like most Asian states ... a new state born after World War II after a struggle with a Western colonial power, in this case Great Britain ," they said.

"Geographically, Israel is in West Asia, only four hours by air from India and 11 hours by air from China .

"Economically, Israel 's rapid transition from Third World power to First World 'start-up nation' echoes the great transformation underway in such Asian countries as India , China and the Four Tigers.

"Scientifically, Israel has emerged as a high-tech superpower, thereby very attractive to Asian high tech powers.

"Militarily, the Israeli military, a world leader in anti-missile technology (Iron Dome) ... is attractive to Asian countries developing their own militaries.

"Politically, the growing threat of Islamism draws many of Asian countries towards a country that is in the forefront of fighting this threat."

In intelligence matters, Israeli "Mossad, with its strong human intelligence capabilities, is attractive for helping these countries overcome foreign threats."

Adelman and Romirowsky sound like labouring to produce an academic commercial to "sell" Israel to Asia .

Ironically both of them had nothing to say about Israel being promoted mainly by its US strategic sponsor as "the only democracy in the Middle East ."

Historically Israel was not born after a struggle with the colonial power of Great Britain but was imposed by this colonial power by force on the region and born after military ongoing ethnic cleansing of the native Arab Palestinians of the land.

Militarily, the anti-missile Iron Dome technology has not proved a success in three Israeli wars on Gaza Strip and Lebanon since 2006.

Politically, the Israeli logistical support of the most extreme among the Islamist insurgents who are fighting against the government of Syria doesn't vindicate that Israel is "in the forefront of fighting" their threat.

## Taking the wrong side

The argument that Mossad is attractive for helping Asian countries overcome their threat deserves more elaboration.

The fact that the Muslim population in Asia is almost double that of the Arab countries combined is a factor that could potentially create a cultural bridge for more interaction between the overwhelmingly Arab West Asia and its mother continent, but nonetheless there is a worrying negative side.

The rise of Islamist extremism could make use of this cultural bridge as well, but the Israeli occupying power is making the best use of it by exploiting this threat to cement its intelligence ties with Asia .

But these extremists are at war with the Arabs and not with Israel , which was so far safe from their threat not because of its defence capabilities against them, but because it was not and is still not targeted by them.

Of course Asia could not idly watch the rise of Islamist extremism and could not avoid taking sides and embark on a defensive battle against it outside its borders otherwise it will be risking fighting this evil within its own borders sooner or later.

However, Asia seems to take the wrong side. The Israeli occupying power is not Asia's best ally to pre-empt this threat, but the Arabs who have gained enough intelligence about them and enough experience in fighting them from Morocco in the far west of the Arab world to Iraq in the far east.

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