

Pakistan's Israel Policy: Domestic Imperatives and Geo-Strategic Constraints

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Pakistan has always equated its policy towards Israel with Palestinian/Arab cause. Therefore, it has always remained passive towards opening up any diplomatic channel vis-à-vis Israel. However, the initiation of Abraham Accords highlighted the changing policy of Arab countries towards Israel with ramifications for the wider Muslim world. This study is aimed at evaluating Pakistan's policy towards Israel within the contemporary strategic context.

Methodology: The study has employed qualitative research methodology. The nature of enquiry is descriptive as well as interpretive centring around the incremental developments shaping Pakistan's policy while at the same time providing reasons to determine the factors. The qualitative analysis has been structured within assumptions of Neoclassical realism. The systemic and domestic level variables have been operationalised with the help of indicators and the related data has been obtained. The data has been obtained from secondary sources including the translations of Quranic verses, statements of state leaders, books and articles.

Findings: The study has identified that the anti-Israel stance gets further consolidated for two reasons; Israel's disruptive role in the Gaza War and the emergence of a strategic Indo-Israel strategic nexus which impact both Pakistan's national security imperatives and its status in the Muslim world. Despite the global incentives and material benefits for Pakistan, policy makers have to incorporate ideological and national security perspectives in assessing the course of actions towards Israel.

Conclusion: The study concludes that rigid societal association with the Islamic guidelines propagated by the religious elite alongside the regional and domestic considerations of the respective governments have defined Pakistan's Israel policy.

Keywords: Israel Policy, Islamic Ideology, Regime Survival, Abraham accords, Indo-Israel nexus, National security.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan and Israel are two countries that were created on religious grounds. For both states, a separate religious identity was the bedrock to strive for the establishment of a separate homeland, and ensure the safety and security of religious minorities; Muslims in case of the former and Jews in case of the latter, in their respective geographical locations (Fahim, 2021). Despite such basic and fundamental similarities in their creation, it is intriguing that both states have not yet established diplomatic relations. Although Tel Aviv has extended the hand of friendship to Pakistan at multiple occasions, these overtures have been turned down by Islamabad (Javaid & Khan, 2014). This is because Pakistan, since the inception of Israel, considers it as an illegal occupier of the Palestinian land and does not recognize it as a legitimate state. It proactively supports the Palestinian demand for the right of self-determination and has been calling on the United Nations to resolve the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict as per its resolutions (Shahzad & Falki, 2026). It has also backed the stance of the Arab neighbours with regards to their conflict with Israel and has participated in different Arab-Israel wars. Additionally, Pakistan equates the struggle of Palestinians with that of Kashmiris and has, therefore, remained reluctant to take any step, particularly towards recognizing Israel that could potentially harm the Kashmir cause (Shabbir, 2020).

The situation was quite straight forward in the past as the stance of Muslim fraternity, particularly the Arabs and Pakistan was uniform. However, recent developments in the Middle East and South Asia, including the Abraham Accords, and the deepening Indo-US relationship, have made the dynamics much more complex. As a result of these changes, several Arab states have established diplomatic relationship with Israel sparking debates in Pakistan regarding the recognition of Israel (Ahmed & Abbas, 2021). One faction questions Pakistan's refusal to recognize Israel when the Arab states are themselves moving towards this direction. This study is, therefore, aimed at exploring the reasons behind Pakistan's non-recognition of Israel by employing the Neoclassical Realist theoretical perspective to examine Pakistan's foreign policy vis-a-vis Israel. It discusses the various systemic and domestic constraints that have contributed to Pakistan's policy of not recognizing Israel. Towards the end, the study also analyses the future trajectory of Pakistan's Israel policy.

1.1 Problem Statement

Arab states are shunning their ideological stance vis-à-vis Israel and adopting a more material approach which ultimately questions Pakistan's refusal to recognize Israel. While formulating ties with Israel will supposedly benefit Pakistan, it is essential to investigate the regional and domestic factors which play a crucial role in determining Pakistan's policy towards Israel.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Pakistan's refusal to foster ties with Israel has always been viewed as a foreign policy choice due to its close ties with Arab states. This perspective faced challenges when Arab states themselves started to develop diplomatic ties with Israel. The adherents of this view found themselves in a dilemma and were unable to answer this tangent which emerged after Abraham Accords. One group assessed that it's only a matter of time that could eventually provide a breakthrough in Pakistan-Israel relations. Nonetheless, this study aims at explaining the structural reasons behind Pakistan's passive stance towards Israel. It argues that ideological aspects, social fabric and Pakistan's own geopolitical environment are instrumental variables that play a crucial role in Pakistan's foreign policy. This study attempts to provide an alternative explanation of Pakistan's policy towards Israel.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Foreign relations of states in the international system are based on their respective national interests. The historical experiences, geopolitical environment and their status in the international system results in the convergence of mutual interests and eventually in the formation of a healthy relationship. On the contrary, these imperatives also lead to divergence of interests among the states thus leading to disgruntled rapports. Weak states with a troubled geopolitical neighbourhood are compelled to shape their

relationships determined by the contemporary constraints of the structure like anarchy and relative power capability with respect to others in the international system. However, often states have been observed deviating from the structural logic by basing their strategic decisions on domestic level imperatives like ideology, perceptions of leaders, public opinion and nature of political systems. Neoclassical Realism argues that the states shape their foreign policies by filtering the systemic level factors according to their respective domestic variables (Rose, 1998). Therefore, to observe the deviation of state behaviour from structural imperatives, it is necessary to analyse the domestic imperatives and constraints of the states for a comprehensive understanding of their respective foreign policy orientations.

Through the tenets of Neoclassical Realism, the analysis of mutual relations between Pakistan and Israel could be aptly outlined. Both Pakistan and Israel were established on the basis of religious ideologies. Religious orientation had, therefore, remained the pivotal part of their domestic and foreign policies. Yet another parallel in the histories of both states was the presence of an insecure geographical environment at the time of their respective formations. Pakistan got independence in a hostile neighbourhood where it had to face the survival threat from its eastern neighbour, India. Moreover, on the western side, the issue of Durand Line with Afghanistan – the border which separates Afghanistan with the Pashtun-dominated region of Pakistan – remained the bone of contention between the two neighbouring states. For that reason, the fear of sub-nationalistic and separatist elements always remained relevant in the domestic policy circles of the country.

Similarly, when Israel was created, its existence as a Jewish state in the heart of Arab land was not accepted by its surrounding neighbours. The precarious environment in which both the states had been surviving in the early days of their inception, resulted in early wars hurling both Pakistan and Israel against their respective neighbours. Through structural realism, imperatives warranted a natural convergence of interests between Pakistan and Israel, however, factors like world view, ideology, regional imperatives and leadership orientation made both apart from each other.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study has employed qualitative research methodology. The nature of enquiry is descriptive as well as interpretive centring around the incremental developments shaping Pakistan's policy while at the same time providing reasons to determine the factors. The qualitative analysis has been structured within assumptions of Neoclassical realism. The systemic and domestic level variables have been operationalised with the help of indicators and the related data has been obtained. The data has been obtained from secondary sources including the translations of Quranic verses, statements of state leaders, books and articles.

4. DISCUSSION

In assessing the bilateral dynamics between Pakistan and Israel, it is essential to analyse through historical perspective and connect it with contemporary dynamics.

4.1 Evolution of Pakistan-Israel Relations

Pakistan and Israel never established diplomatic relations since their inception. At the time of their creation, there was willingness on the part of Israeli leadership to establish a better rapport. For instance, Weizmann desired and called, "Our small state in Palestine that shall soon have to follow you. Many problems will be common to both of us, and it is my earnest hope that it may be possible for us to deal with them together, and in cooperation, for the good of both of our people" (Weizmann, 1979).

However, the leadership in Pakistan considered Israel's creation a violation of Palestinians' right of self-determination. The backdrop to adopt this approach was shaped by the event of Indian occupation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which Pakistan considered a violation of the right of self-determination of 90 percent of Kashmiri Muslims. Pakistan's founding father, Mr. Jinnah was against the partition plan of the UN and claimed that if the partition of Palestine was materialized it would lead to "the gravest disaster

and unprecedented conflict, not only between the Arabs and the authority that would undertake to enforce the partition plan, but the entire Muslim world will revolt against such a decision which cannot be supported historically, politically or morally. And in such a case, Pakistan will have no other course left but to give its fullest support to the Arabs” (The Pakistan Times, 1947).

During the early years of Israel’s creation, Pakistan along with Arab countries did not recognize it and became the torch bearer of the Palestinian cause on different diplomatic forums, particularly the UN. It was estimated that as compared to other Muslim states, Pakistan stood at the top of the list in terms of defending the Palestinian cause during the UN debate on the matter of partition of Palestine (Burke, 1973).

Since Pakistan was created on the basis of Islam, therefore, the Islamic ideology was grafted in the fabric of its political and social system. Whenever the ‘Israel question’ came to surface, the ideologically inspired factors raised their heads and pressurized the officials into shaping the state’s response. For instance, the religious structure of Pakistani society was responsible for carving out curricula at educational institutions. Being ideologically oriented, the curriculum created repulsion in a lay man against Jews. Islamic identity is irreversible for both Muslims and Muslim territories. So if the land is occupied by infidels, all Muslims are obliged to take back the occupied territories. Therefore, the protection of Palestine is not only to defend the sovereignty at the territorial level but also to fulfil religious obligations (Xin, 2021).

Similarly, the Israeli experts also considered that religious solidarity with the Arab-Muslim countries might warrant fear of an adverse response by radical Islamist groups throughout the Muslim world. Sediments of similar kind of sentiments are also present in Israeli society. Thus establishing diplomatic relations with Israel may cause instability within Pakistan and resentments within the Israeli society as well. These societal constraints have jeopardized the prospects for establishing the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Israel, and are the principal causes of non-recognition of Israel by Pakistan (Javaid & Khan, 2014).

Politically and diplomatically, Pakistan equated the struggle of Kashmiris against India with the resistance of Palestinians vis-à-vis Israel. Since Kashmir policy remained the pivot of Pakistan’s relations with India, therefore, any attempt to not support the Palestinian cause was considered as an undoing of Kashmir policy as well. Kashmir policy has been the Achilles’ heel of all governments in Pakistan, therefore, regime survival considerations have always led policy making in favour of Kashmir and Palestinian cause. Since Pakistan’s inception, the pro-Palestinian policy remained a top priority of the status quo, especially throughout the decade of 1980s. The regional context also favoured that policy as during that time, Arabs were fighting three full-fledged wars against Israel. Moreover, the factor of solidarity with the Arab Muslims and the unity of the Arabs themselves prompted Pakistan to adopt the aforementioned policy.

Additionally, the concepts of war and jihad are deeply implanted in the hearts of Muslims and are also recorded extensively in the Quran. This is also the basis for the reason behind Muslims struggle against Israel which Pakistan became the part of. (Boner, 2006) In this, the Quranic verses also point towards this direction. For example, “O believers, fight the unbelievers who are near you” (The Quran, 9:123) and “Here war is allowed in self-defence” (The Quran, 2:190;22:39) are some of the verses which guide towards armed struggle.

During that period, both Pakistan and Israel also used strategic means against each other. It is reported that Pakistan Air Force (PAF) pilots participated in the Six-Day War of 1967, fought between Israel and Arab countries (Jalil, 2022). Similarly, an aerial attack was planned by Israeli intelligence organization, Mossad, in collaboration with India’s spy agency for destroying Pakistan’s Kahutta Research facility. However, the plan was not materialised (Bashir et al, 2019).

4.2 The Breaking of Ice

The realities of post-cold war dynamics coupled with the Arab states' gradual retreat from the Palestinian cause changed the political dynamics of the region. During the 1990s, Israel had solidified its political status. It was recognised by two Arab states i.e., Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Even the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) under the leadership of Yasser Arafat accepted Israel's virtual political status in return for a limited autonomy of the Palestinian territories – West Bank and Gaza. These transformations also initiated the political question in Pakistan's strategic circles regarding Israel's recognition. It was questioned that if the Arab states themselves were softening their stance and opening towards Israel then why should Pakistan not follow the suit?

Moreover, owing to the new realities and opportunities emerging under unipolarity, India formally established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 and gradually began to develop a strategic partnership in which weapons and technology sharing became the top priority. Therefore, among the strategic decision makers in Pakistan, the option of recognising Israel was attaining more and more consideration. It was suggested that if Pakistan moved towards recognition, then the said Indo-Israel nexus could be countered (Javaid & Khan, 2014).

Within the transformed context, it was quite obvious that the leadership in Pakistan gradually began to politically discuss the pros and cons of establishing rapport with Israel. In 1996, Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stated that Pakistan was waiting for "Prime Actors" to move towards normalization with Israel. She further added that the establishment of friendly relations and cooperation between Pakistan and Israel were dependent on the approval of the OIC members (Kumaraswamy, 2000).

It was during the rule of General Musharraf in Pakistan that serious deliberations were made to move closer towards Israel. Musharraf was a strong supporter of Pak-Israel relations. In July 2003, he advocated for increased domestic efforts regarding the opportunities of establishing diplomatic ties with Israel (Siddiq, 2021). He suggested that the bilateral engagement might prove to be a counterweight to India (Kugelman, 2020). The academic circles also began to put forward the political and economic advantages of recognising Israel. They claimed that if Israel and Pakistan had good relations, Pakistan would benefit from Israel's strong lobbying powers in the world to improve its image in the eyes of the international community (Bashir et al, 2019). Moreover, they asserted that in case there was cooperation between Israel and Pakistan, the two could succeed in dealing with militant extremism, which was a common concern during that time. They suggested that peaceful and fruitful cooperation could be made in the field of agriculture where Pakistan could gain from Israel's expertise in utilizing the deserts for agricultural purposes (Kumaraswamy, 2000).

Mr. Riaz Khokhar, Pakistan's foreign secretary during General Musharraf regime had said that "sooner or later Pakistan will have to recognize Israel. Although that possibility is far off, eventually we will have to deal with it but the aspirations of Palestinian people would always be at the top of agenda for us. Our commitment to the Palestinian issue is second to none" (The Dawn, 2025). Although General Musharraf was supporting Pakistan's relationship with Israel, but he was also cautious of Pakistani public opinion towards Palestinian aspirations. For instance, while addressing the Jews in the US, he concluded that "Pakistan has no direct conflict or dispute with Israel. We pose no threat to Israel's security. We trust that Israel poses no threat to Pakistan's national security. But our people have a deep sense of sympathy for the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspirations for statehood" (Musharraf, 2005).

4.3 Domestic Imperatives

The above discussion has made it evident that even if the systemic level imperatives created opportunities for Pakistan to establish relations with Israel, still the policy makers were reluctant to take the final decision in that regard and linked the matter of recognition of Israel with the decision of Arab countries. Here it is pertinent to go deep and unfold the domestic political domain of Pakistan to explore the reasons for the aforementioned reluctance.

Every state has its unique domestic context which affects its foreign policy decision making process. It is true for democratic as well as authoritarian political systems. In the case of Pakistan, what seems to be common in terms of its policy towards Israel has been the fact that no government, ruling elites and institutional stakeholders could manage to proceed towards establishing a formal relationship. The reasons behind the commonality of that policy can be explored within the domestic political context of Pakistan.

a. Religious Interpretation

Rigid societal association with the country's ideological foundations being propagated by the religious elite is the dominant factor that affects Pakistan's Israel policy. As mentioned earlier the ideological foundations of both Pakistan and Israel are religious in nature. Due to their respective religious injunction, Muslims as well as Jews look at politics from a religious lens. Since most of Pakistanis give a special place to religion in their individual and collective lives, therefore, they make sense of Israel through the lens of that inclination. When it comes to Jews and Christians, the religious segment in Pakistan derive the common understanding from the verse of the Holy Quran which states, "O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you who turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guided not a people unjust" (The Quran, 5:51).

According to the religiously constructed binaries of "we" vs "they", the Jews are perceived as "they", which is deeply embedded in the strategic culture of the Pakistani state and any voice calling for relations with Israel is seen through this lens and in-turn resented. For instance, the debate initiated by General Musharraf about recognising Israel received strong backlash from Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) – a political grouping of religious political parties – which had formed governments in two provinces then and was leading the opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan. MMA threatened to launch a mass agitation to overthrow Musharraf regime. The pressure was so overwhelming that the incumbent government had to end the debate. Even during times when the religious parties were not in government they still had (and still have) street power and the ability to mobilise masses whenever the issue was religio-political in nature.

b. Political Survival

The aforementioned ideological factor is closely linked with another domestic variable of regime survival consideration. The ultimate objective of any government is to ensure its survival. In case of deciding between the domestic and international imperatives, usually the regime survival concerns take the top priority. If the survival of regime is under threat then usually systemic level pressures are ignored even if the decision costs the long-term interests of the state. The domestic imperative of regime survival becomes more significant when the governments are politically and economically weak. Political history of Pakistan indicates weak governments in which most of the time, the government formation was carried out through coalition. Moreover, economically Pakistan was gradually caught in a severe debt trap and instability. These weaknesses were easily exploited by strong and disciplined religious groups for their political agenda. Therefore, in Pakistan debate about recognising Israel could not make a breakthrough due to the regime survival considerations of the respective governments. Although the governments from the period 1990 to 2020 desired and initiated the question of Israel, but no one could pursue it because of the political cost attached to that debate.

c. Regional Considerations

Another significant domestic factor that has been shaping Pakistan's policy towards Israel is associated with the Iranian position vis-à-vis the US and Israel. Iran is Pakistan's first door neighbour in its south-western flank. Just after independence, Iran was the first state that accorded recognition to Pakistan in 1947. Since 1979 Iran is being ruled by the ideologically oriented Shiite regime and in Pakistan, there is a significant number of Shiite Muslims who have reverence with the religious clergy of Iran. This

affiliation has always prompted the governments to not take a decision offending its close neighbour regarding Israel.

In terms of Israel, Iran has a very rigid stance. Iran's ruling regime perceives Israel as its top enemy in the Middle East. Both states were involved in diplomatic, political and military confrontations in different conflicts of the region e.g., in Syria, and Lebanon. Iran is a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and has been assisting and helping Hamas; a non-state actor fighting against Israel. But some experts believe that the Palestinian cause has been harmed by the fierce Iranian rhetoric, particularly launched by the Iranian President Ahmadinejad (2005-13) against Israel, which has resulted in eclipsed Palestinian cause (Hussain, 2021).

When it comes to the question of Israel for Pakistan the Iranian factor plays a considerably pivotal role. Iran has developed an asymmetric power capability of inciting, forming and using its religiously oriented proxies in other states for securing its interests. It has, therefore, strategically been very difficult for Pakistan to take a pro-Israel approach fearing a domestic backlash potentially being incited by Iran. This strategic constraint is pertinent because as compared to India and Afghanistan, on the Iranian border Pakistan has deployed the least security forces and in case of confrontation with Iran there could be a serious challenge to the security of Pakistan from three different fronts (Malik et al, 2018).

4.4 The Transformed Strategic Context

The efforts at the beginning of the current millennia in terms of opening Pakistan-Israel relationship suffered a setback gradually when realities of the regional strategic context of the Middle East and South Asia transformed. Although the so-called Arab Spring lost its vigour during its early years and the traditional regional regimes of the Middle East managed to offset the onslaught of the popular demands of democratic systems, still, the strategic calculus of the regional Arab elites shifted from their traditional matrix.

One of the major fallouts of the events of civil wars ensuing in the aftermath of the Arab Spring was the increased strategic space gained by Iran. Apart from Lebanon, which was considered the traditional strategic foothold, Iran made inroads into Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Israel's technological advancements in cyber and military domains, and unabated expansion into Palestinian territories made Iran the only regional powerhouse to counter Israeli expansionism. It resulted in the increased influence of Iran across the region. Due to their disturbed domestic context, being introduced by the Arab uprisings, and also owing to the enhanced Iranian asymmetric power capacity, the Arab regimes gradually began to look towards Israel. Furthermore, Israel got attention due to its development in intelligence technology, which the Arab regimes needed to counter domestic dissidents. The Palestinian cause was also being side-lined due to the unconditional support of the US, particularly by the Trump administration. During that period, the US could not play its due role in the resolution of the Palestine issue. After Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the US lost its credibility as a mediator in the conflict (Malik et al, 2018). In fact, the US's priority shifted from settling the Palestine issue towards encircling Iran in the region.

Initially, the US began promoting secret collaboration between Israel and Arab regimes in cyber and intelligence fields. In 2016, Israel shared the Pegasus 3 software with a few of the Arab states, which was accused of being used by intelligence forces of Saudi Arabia (Levinson, 2020). Following these secret engagements came the formal Abraham Accords. These were series of agreements initiated between August 2020 and January 2021, which normalized the relations between Israel and four Arab states including UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan (Bhattacharjee, 2022). The Abraham accords are claimed to have been formed for economic cooperation and establishing regional peace. The main purpose of these accords quickly shifted towards setting the stage for geostrategic cooperation against Iran and potential domestic upheavals.

For instance, the Arab signatories' subsequent procurement of advanced weapons and technologies from the US and Israel, cooperation in developing anti-drone systems, and formation of military blocs are a

testament of the strategic nature of Abraham Accords (Tauhidi, 2022). The US has its strategic interests to pursue through these accords. Its administration aims to delegate the security of its traditional allies at the regional level. In this regard, it plans to assist in making an integrated missile and air defence capacity of its regional allies and partners against the threat of missile and drone attacks by Iran and its proxies. The US decided that UAE, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Egypt, Oman, Israel, and other regional allies would be incorporated into this cooperative framework (Rod, 2022).

The Iran-oriented nature of the collaboration under the Abraham accords is evident from the reactions of the Iranian leadership. Just after the conclusion of diplomatic relations between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said, “Some of the regional countries’ people are pious Muslims but their rulers neither understand religion nor (their) debt to the nation of Palestine, to their brothers speaking their language. How could you reach out your hands to Israel? And then you want to give them bases in the region? All the severe consequences that would arise from this are on you” (Iran Primer, 2020). On another occasion, he warned, “The rulers of the UAE should know that if they think they can get closer to the enemies of Islam and Iran, and they can buy security for themselves, they have gone in the wrong direction” (Iran Primer, 2020).

During the aforementioned period, the South Asian strategic context also saw transformations. Since Pakistan’s foreign policy is India-centric, therefore, its strategic calculations via other states and regions are seen through an Indian-specified lens. Since 2014, when BJP came to power in India, the leadership in Pakistan perceived that India launched an international campaign to isolate Pakistan on terrorism charges. Pakistan considered that India played a negative role in putting its name on the grey list of FATF. India also stripped illegally occupied part of Kashmir of its special status by revoking article 370 of its constitution, which had earlier protected its special nature.

All these measures have further intensified rivalry between the traditional arch rivals. In parallel to all these developments, under the incumbent BJP government, a vibrant Indo-Israel strategic nexus is significantly cemented. India has been purchasing Israeli advanced technology and armaments. According to an estimate, Israel has exported \$662 million worth of weapons to India (Shay, 2017). In 2014, India and Israel signed intelligence sharing agreement to fight Islamic extremism along with the provision of naval defence missile system to India. India has been using Israeli-made unmanned drones for surveillance and military purposes. In 2016, both states jointly agreed to produce air-to-air missiles and weaponry. In February 2017, Indian navy launched Israeli developed Integrated Under-Water Harbour Defence and Surveillance System (IUHDSS). In the same year, to advance surveillance technology, the Indian military deployed an Israeli-developed comprehensive integrated border management system (CIBMS) along its border with Pakistan (Shay, 2017).

Furthermore, both India and Israel have started collaboration in cyber technology. It has been reported that the newly launched techSAR space program by Indian military can monitor Pakistan’s military activities and strategic apparatus near its border. Moreover, the purchase of AWACS of India from Israel provided the Indian Air force with major surveillance capabilities during a conflict (Mustafa et al, 2019).

The Indian strategic moves against Pakistan coupled with its gradually developing strong nexus with Israel further creates a mistrust in Pakistan against Israel. This perception is solidified when India aimed to initiate its strategic advancements in the Middle East. For instance, a year after the initiation of Abraham accords, a strategic alignment of four countries i.e. I2U2 (including India, Israel, USA, and UAE), under the patronage of the US, was formed. It has been claimed that I2U2 was the first step by Israel to increase its influence in the Arab world. In the first virtual summit of its leaders, the member states agreed to cooperate in the six key sectors including food security, water, health, energy, transport and space. UAE agreed to invest \$2 billion in India to build food parks at the time of food insecurity mainly due to the on-going war between Ukraine and Russia (Bhattacharjee, 2022).

India and Israel are in talks to conclude a free trade agreement which will boost trade among the members of the new Quad. (Roche, 2022) It has been claimed even by the Indian strategic experts that being part of

a grouping which is being seen as Iran-specific it would be difficult for India to maintain its stance of “strategic non-alignment” (Taneja, 2022). It is, therefore, assumed in Pakistan that it would be strategically incorrect to get closer to Israel given the fact that India is moving towards a strategic alignment with Israel.

4.5 The Gaza War

The latest development in the context of Pakistan-Israel relations came in the aftermath of Israeli activities in Gaza. After the of Hamas attack on Israel, as a result of deteriorating socio-economic situation in the Gaza territory, Israel launched massive air campaign and ground offensive against the civilian population. As per the UN estimates, nearly 46000 people have been killed as a result of Israeli military offensive in addition to nearly 110,000 injuries and 1.8 million displaced people (Carrol, 2025). Israeli actions were condemned not only by the Arab and Muslim states but also the Western and European countries. Norway, Spain and Ireland while condemning Israel also moved ahead in recognizing Palestine as a separate and independent state (Wilson, 2024).

The expectations that Abraham Accords would expand into the wider Arab region also proved to be in shatters. Although the existing Arab states in Abraham Accords did not reverse their decision of opening up to Israel yet the prospects of other Arab states, especially KSA, has been frozen. Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) categorically rejected the idea of normalization with Israel before the recognition of Palestinian statehood (Cafiero, 2024). Additionally, Arabs’ public opinion drastically changed during the course of Gaza War. A poll conducted in January 2024 indicated that 59 percent of Arab respondents feel that prospects of peace with Israel are essentially non-existent. In the same poll, 67 percent Arab respondents viewed the role of UAE (Abraham Accords member-state) negative while 36 percent considered suspension of relations with Israel as the most pertinent step that needs to be taken (Arab Center, 2024).

Given such immense public pressure, it is unlikely that the Arab states might seek normalization with Israel. Therefore, Pakistan also affirmed its position vis-à-vis Israel-Palestine issue. Pakistan’s PM, Shahbaz Sharif stressed the two-state solution and condemned the Israeli brutalities in Gaza (PM Office, 2023). It also reaffirms Pakistan’s position in drawing comparisons between Gaza and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), and how both Israel and India are suppressing the rights of native people for their expansionist agendas.

The possibility of Israel’s normalization in the region got further complicated by two developments; Israeli attack on Iran in June and on Qatar in September. Both these attacks were condemned by the majority of Muslim world including the Arab states and Pakistan. PM Sharif condemned the attack on Iran and labelled it as “unlawful, unjustified and uncalled for” at the ECO summit (Khan, 2025). Similarly, he remarked the attack on Qatar as a ‘flagrant violation of [Qatar’s] sovereignty’ (Dawn News, 2025). Such developments reflect two aspects. First, given Israel’s history of attacking the neighbouring states and targeting the civilian populations in and outside of Gaza, its reputation amongst the Muslim countries has further deteriorated. Second, while it is difficult for those Muslim states to sever diplomatic relations with Israel who are the part of Abraham Accords and are dependent upon the US security guarantees, it is very likely that any new Muslim state would come forward to recognize Israel. This aspect has gained strength during the 40-day Iran War in 2026. Not only Netanyahu, Israel’s Prime Minister, incited President Trump to attack Iran but also expanded Israeli attacks in Lebanon and Syria. Additionally, Israel remained the staunch opponent of ceasefire efforts and peace talks carried out by Pakistan during the course of the conflict.

Hence, given Pakistan’s stance of an independent Palestinian state, rallying around the Muslim countries of the region and effort to establish a long-lasting peace between US-Iran and the entire Middle Eastern region, the probability of a thaw in Pakistan ties with the Zionist entity is low primarily due to latter’s disruptive behaviour, violation of international law and human rights, and consistent attempts of

expansionism through occupying West Bank, parts of Syria and southern Lebanon, alongside exploiting the opportunity to attack the regional countries.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the hindrances in the way of building Pakistan-Israel relations. It has been found that the commitment to Islamic ideological guidelines being supported by strong religious elites in the society, the Iranian factor and the developing strategic Indo-Israel nexus are the primary factors halting the development of Pakistan-Israel relationship.

Sometimes the states deviate from the domestic and geopolitical compulsions and if their primary national interests seem to be ensured they go against the said compulsions. In this context, a question may be deliberated that could, by recognising Israel, Pakistan's primary national interests related to its stressed economic conditions, sanctions related to being on the grey list of FATF, and the Kashmir issue be addressed or if Pakistan recognises Israel could the USA be more inclined in terms of helping Pakistan concerning the above interests?

Although it is difficult to predict the reactions of other states in the dynamic nature of international relations, still, on the basis of contemporary calculations of the US, it is quite evident that both India and Israel are more important to it. It has been analysed that recognition of Pakistan would be "largely inconsequential in Washington and relations with India are far too important to Israel, touching its core relations with the US on the one hand and its new-found friendship with the Arabs on the other" So even if Pakistan recognises Israel there are no strategic incentives for the US and Israel in addressing its economic and strategic compulsions. Therefore, till the time being, it can be stated that due to domestic imperatives, and geopolitical constraints related to the domestic imperatives and geostrategic constraints due to Indo-Israel strategic nexus Pakistan would continue its traditional policy vis-à-vis Israel.

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