# India and West Asia

The West Asian region breaks down conveniently into concentric circles of proximity  
:  
• The innermost circle comprises Afghanistan, the Gulf Cooperation  
Council countries, Iran, Iraq and Yemen.  
• In the next circle are the countries of the Mashreq ( West Asia)–(  
Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) - to our west and those of Central  
Asia to our north-west;  
• next the circle comprising Turkey, countries of the Maghreb(  
Mediterranean sea-board)- Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco- and  
the countries in the Horn of Africa -Djibouti, Sudan and Somalia.

At Independence the first three decisions on India’s foreign policy concerned  
West Asia:  
• our active support to the Khilafat Movement;  
• India’s stand in the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in  
1947 when in a dissenting note we advocated the establishment of a  
federal Palestine with internal autonomy for the Jewish population;  
• and the decision on how we were going to deal with the state of Israel  
when it became independent in 1948.  
These decisions were conditioned by India’s Partition which had left a  
traumatised, yet larger, Muslim community within India than went to Pakistan. The  
importance of the region, particularly Mecca and Medina in fulfilling the spiritual and  
religious needs of India’s Muslim population could not be under-estimated.

The considerations which have guided  
our policy in these years remain valid today despite the change in the political,  
economic and social matrix:  
• Friendly relations with the people of the region on the basis of shared  
history and culture;  
• equidistance in intra-regional conflicts;  
• support to the Palestinian cause;  
• Desire to play an effective role in the region, even as a possible  
intermediary;  
• in this context, management of the relations with Israel;  
• oppose both exclusivist religious ideologies and religious fanaticism;  
• Develop economic, trade and investment ties;  
• Energy security

As Prof. Girijesh Pant has written ‘for India, West Asia is the region to  
augment its power rather than to display or assert its power.’ The thrust of India’s  
West Asia policy and diplomacy thus has to be geared towards mobilizing resources  
- political, strategic, economic and cultural - from the region to contribute in its  
emergence as global power.

The region presents the following challenges:  
• Waning of the belief in Arab solidarity, unity and socialism which had blurred  
,if not eliminated, differences of sects, beliefs and region and tribe; Change in  
the social structure and mores in the region in favour of sect, tribe and  
tradition; and a conscious desire to get away from western values. The  
growing tension between the Sunni and Shia Muslims radiating westward  
from Pakistan from which India has remained immune so far;  
• The emergence of a ‘back-to-roots thinking which gives primacy to religious  
belief in political matters; ;the sway of Al Qaeda and the Taliban;  
• The consolidation of the state of Israel in the region, and internationally;  
the unwritten edict which makes it taboo to mention Israeli nuclear  
weapons while giving no quarter to Iran ( and Iraq earlier) on the  
presumption that they either possess or seek to build them.  
• the impotence of major players to find a way to establish an secure,  
independent and viable Palestinian state causing a running sore on the  
psyche of its peoples ; the dilemma of not having an honest broker to solve  
the Palestinian issue coupled with growing disenchantment with US power  
and ability to perform this role;  
• The presence of foreign troops, in ever larger numbers, both on land  
and sea- we now have US troops in bases in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Qatar,  
UAE and Western navies patrolling the Gulf, in particular the Hormuz  
straits  
• The passing of Arab leadership from Egypt, Syria, Libya , Iraq and Tunisia in  
the post-colonial period to the growing clout of non-Arab players –Iran, US,  
Turkey and Israel, – in the post-secular period;  
• Iran is today the biggest beneficiary of US intervention in Iraq as well as the  
policies of Israel and earlier US Administrations. With its ascendency its  
neighbours, many with significant Shia minorities, are concerned, particularly  
Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Iran has now proxies in Lebanon, Gaza, Syria and  
Palestine;  
• The importance of energy resources of West Asia as the driver of political  
and economic developments in a globalizing world: differences on their  
security and their ownership;  
• The coming into their own of the Gulf Sheikdoms on the back of high returns  
from energy , growing stash of foreign exchange reserves and low population  
bases leading leveraging these resources for internal and external  
investments;  
• Consolidation of authoritarian governments and suppression of dissent within  
the trappings of democracy; the inability and unwillingness to hand political  
power to Islamic- oriented parties; at the same time, an increasing recourse to  
confessional type of governance- Lebanon no longer the exception but the  
model;  
• The increasing desire on the part of major Arab countries-Iraq, Saudi Arabia  
and Egypt to seek nuclear and missile weapon capacity both to create  
equities against Israel but to offset other regional players like Iran , all within  
professed adherence to the NPT straitjacket;  
• The use of Terror as an instrument of political negotiation :Internationalization  
of the scourge of terrorism and terrorist groups after 9/11 ; by implication a  
change from opposition of such groups to their placation through co-option  
and clandestine support to achieve larger goals of religion or political  
dominance;  
• popular frustration at the inability to change systems and promote  
participative governance;  
• The passing by of West Asia by the most significant development of the 21st  
century- the knowledge economy; West Asia is at most a recipient, but  
neither an innovator, nor a provider;  
• Moribund nature of Arab and Islamic institutions – Arab League and the OIC;  
while the former is regarded by Egypt as an instrument f its foreign policy,  
Saudi Arabia takes a similar view of the latter. Suffice it to say that in the face  
of the tremendous pressure that Islam and Arabs have been under since 9/11  
the two organisations have failed to take up the challenge to project the  
universality of the Arab and the benign face of Islam.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menik/4801129826/>

* Interests
  + Oil
  + Indian workers in ME
* Indian workers
  + About 4.5 million Indians work in ME
  + Send huge remittances back (USD 20 bn in 2007)
* Palestine
  + Empathises and supports the desire of the Palestinian people for an independent state of their own
  + Mahatma Gandhi had said – “Palestine is for the Palestinian people just as France is for the French and England for the English people”
  + India has supported the cause of Palestenian people
  + India has a very balanced view. It does not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries
  + India reiterated its support to the Palestinian cause at the 2007 Annapolis Conference.
* Israel
  + Israel is entitled to be accepted as a full member of the international community, with the right to live in peace and good neighbourly relations with its neighbours within secure and recognised borders
* India concerned at the increased and increasing volatility and radicalisation in this region
  + West Asia has emerged as one of the two most important breeding grounds of terrorism
  + India, being next door to West Asia, has every reason to feel worried and concerned

# Arab-Israel Conflict

* Palestine
  + UNSC resolutions 242 and 338 lay down the broad outlines for a settlement. But Palestine remains the core issue
  + Israel must end its occupation and withdraw from the territories it occupied in 1967
  + Israel should make available to the future Palestine state an area of the same size as the whole of occupied West Bank
  + , there are formulae for tackling the refugee problem, perhaps the most emotional of the six issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The Palestinian leadership will be loath to formally give up “the right of return”, offered to the refugees in United Nations Resolution 194. At the same time, no Israeli leadership of any political persuasion will ever acknowledge or agree to the return of over 4 million Palestinian refugees to Israel proper.
  + Jerusalem is yet another emotional and complex issue
* Syria-Israel dispute
  + Israel clearly should vacate Golan Heights
  + Israel knows and acknowledges this fact
* Israel-Lebanon dispute
  + Second Lebanon war 2006

### Palestine Peace Process

* Current issues
  + Borders and division of the land
  + Palestinian concerns over Israeli settlements in West Bank
  + Status of Jerusalem
  + Israeli security concerns over terrorism, safe borders, incitements, violence
  + Right of return of Palestinian refugees living in Palestinian diaspora.
* Peace effort
  + Rogers peace plan and Saddat initiative (1970-72)
  + Madrid Conference (1991)
  + Oslo Accords (1993)
  + Hebron Agreeemtn
  + Wye River Memorandum
  + Camp David Accords (2000)
    - Israel offered Palestine approximately 95% of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip if 69 Jewish settlements could be ceded to Israel
    - East Jeruselam would be with Israel
    - The issue of Palestinian right of return would be solved through significant monetary reparations
    - Arafat rejected the offer
  + 2002 Beirut Summit
  + Annapolis Conference (2007)
    - Two state solution
  + Road Map for Peace
    - Quartet of US, EU, UN and Russia outlined the principles of a road map for peace including an independent Palestinian state
    - The plan called for independent actions by Israel and the Palestinian Authority with disputed issues put off until a rapport can be established.
    - <basically CBMs>
    - Neither party has yet fulfilled its obligations under this peace plan
  + 2010 direct talks
    - In 2010 Obama pushed to revive the stalled peace proecess

### What role can India play in peace process in middle-east?

West Asia is a part of India's extended neighbourhood, with which we have

had a close interaction over millennia. Consequently, we have deep interest

in peace and stability in the region and have been closely monitoring

developments in the region.

We believe that there is no military solution to the Israel-Palestine and

related issues. India has been calling for all parties in West Asia to fully

cooperate with the efforts of the international community. We support the

revival of direct negotiations between the leaders of Israel and Palestine,

the momentum for which was generated at the Annapolis Conference. At

the conference, India expressed its readiness to play its due role in the

collective endeavour to strengthen the forces of peace and stability in the

region. The Arab Peace Initiative, re-launched in Saudi Arabia in March

(Riyadh -2007), provides a constructive framework for achieving such a

comprehensive peace.

**India and Israel: an unlikely alliance**

India has the world’s third largest Muslim population, and political and economic ties with Arab nations. It is also buying weapons and military expertise from its new friend Israel

by Isabelle Saint-Mézard

India and Israel were born (in 1947 and 1948) through long and violent partition processes, from the ruins of the British empire. Both were caught up in inextricable armed conflicts. Yet this did not make for any particular affinity between the countries: rather the reverse.

From the 1920s onwards, the leaders of India’s nationalist movement sided with the Palestinian Arabs against British imperialism, opposing the Zionist aim of establishing a Jewish state. India voted against the partition of Palestine at the UN General Assembly of 1947, and only recognised Israel in 1950. Until the 1980s it formed a bloc with the Arab countries at the UN and within the Non-aligned Movement, in defence of the Palestinian people’s right to a sovereign state.

India had its reasons: it was worried that the Muslim world would side with Pakistan over its claim to Kashmir; it was concerned about energy security (India depends largely on the Middle East for its oil); and in the late 1980s and 1990s, when it had a serious payments imbalance, it relied on money sent back home by the many expatriates working in the Gulf states ([1](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb1)).

But the gap between India and Israel has narrowed over the years. As early as the 1960s the two countries established secret military and intelligence contacts. Israel was willing to help the Indian army in its conflicts with China (in 1962) and Pakistan (in 1965 and 1971). In 1978, Israel’s foreign minister Moshe Dayan even made a secret trip to India to propose cooperation. In 1992 New Delhi established formal diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv. The decision was facilitated by the end of the cold war and the Madrid Middle East conference of October 1991, which gave hopes for peace. But it was also prompted by India’s disappointment with the meagre results of its foreign policy: it had never managed to neutralise Pakistan’s influence among the Arab countries and its own position on Kashmir had been repeatedly condemned by resolutions of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

Diplomatic relations with Israel were initiated by the centre-left Indian National Congress (Congress Party) but it was the extremist Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power between 1998 and 2004, which developed the partnership and gave it meaning. Suspicious of, if not hostile to, the Muslim world, the BJP did not hesitate to show its sympathy for Israel. Unlike the Congress Party, the BJP has never felt constrained by the opinion of India’s Muslim minority in its domestic policy. The post-9/11 situation strengthened the relationship as the BJP-led coalition government eagerly promoted the idea of liberal democracies forming a united front against Islamist terrorism. The BJP invited Israel’s prime minister Ariel Sharon to visit India in September 2003, to commemorate the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the US.

This led to the dream of a strategic triangle between Israel, India and the US ([2](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb2)), an idea first put forward on 8 May 2003 by Brajesh Mishra, then India’s national security adviser, in a speech at a dinner of the American Jewish Committee: “Our principal theme here today is a collective remembrance of the horrors of terrorism and a celebration of the alliance of free societies involved in combating this scourge. The US, India and Israel have all been prime targets of terrorism. They have to jointly face the same ugly face of modern day terrorism” ([3](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb3)). Later, representatives of the governments discussed defence and anti-terrorism issues. Meanwhile, a decisive rapprochement was taking place between pro-Indian and pro-Israeli pressure groups in Washington.

**Congress in power**

After the Congress Party’s return to office at the head of a coalition government in 2004 there was less emphasis on the ideology, but the Indian-Israeli relationship was not fundamentally affected because it concerned the priority areas of defence and security.

The range of links has diversified and there is now collaboration in agriculture, tourism, science and technology. Although largely dependent on the diamond industry, which accounted for nearly 50% of all trade between the two countries in 2008 ([4](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb4)), commercial exchanges between India and Israel rose in value from $200m in 1992 to $4bn in 2008. But defence remains the core of the cooperative relationship.

Israel’s defence industry relies on exports for its survival. Until the end of the 1990s most shipments were to China. But the US veto on the transfer of sensitive technologies to China forced Israel to look to other markets, including India. This proved fruitful as economic growth allowed India to finance its (considerable) requirements for defence equipment. India was looking for new suppliers, as Russian manufacturers were only able to fill part of the void left by the disappearance of its former Soviet suppliers. (Many Soviet production lines were dismantled or put out of action after 1991.) The US was also moving closer to India, which facilitated technology transfer.

The Phalcon radar systems developed by Israel Aerospace Industries for the Indian air force ([5](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb5)) are a good example. Having forbidden their sale to China in 2000, the US authorised their sale to India. The conclusion New Delhi drew was that a rapprochement with Tel Aviv would give it access to technology the US was reluctant to export.

In a decade, Tel Aviv has become a leading supplier of arms to India, now its largest export market. The value of the contracts signed over the last 10 years is estimated at nearly $10bn ([6](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb6)). Flexibility and responsiveness are Israel’s great strengths. It was able to adapt right away to the needs of India’s armed forces (most of whose equipment is Soviet or Russian) and gained lucrative contracts for the modernisation of Russian equipment: tanks, aircraft carriers, helicopters and fighter aircraft have all been fitted with Israeli electronics; it was able to respond quickly when supplying the Indian army with munitions during the 1999 confrontation with Pakistan in Kashmir, the “Kargil crisis” ([7](http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/11indiaisrael#nb7)).

Industrial cooperation has centred on surveillance radar and drone aircraft, and on missile systems. India and Israel signed a contract worth $1.1bn for three Phalcon radar systems in 2004. Cooperation on missiles began in 2001 with a contract worth $270m for a ship defence system based on Barak missiles. It reached a new level in January 2006 when the countries agreed to jointly develop a new generation of missiles. This brought Israel into competition with Russia, which was also jointly developing cruise missiles with India. In 2007, India and Israel unveiled a joint project worth $2.5bn for the development of a new air defence system based on Barak missiles, for use by the Indian air force and army.

**Spy satellites**

Another area of cooperation is satellite imaging. In January 2008 India launched an advanced spy satellite on Israel’s behalf, capable of providing information on strategic installations in Iran. In April 2009 India launched its own spy satellite, acquired as a matter of urgency after the Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 2008 that left 170 dead and revealed serious gaps in its territorial surveillance network. India also spent $600m on Israeli radar to strengthen the warning systems along its western seaboard.

Israel is certainly a privileged partner in India’s efforts to improve its territorial security systems. The countries are strengthening an already close cooperative relationship on counter-terrorism. Israel has helped India to build a barrier along the “line of control”, its de facto border with Pakistan; it has provided surveillance systems to prevent infiltration by Islamist militants and Israelis are among the few outside consultants to have visited the theatre of operations in Kashmir.

New Delhi, like most of the international community, still supports the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state. But the crises between Israel and its neighbours have taught India to hedge its diplomatic bets. It tries to keep the relationship with Israel separate from the Middle East situation – to protect its cooperative relationship with Israel while taking care not to antagonise Arab countries. India’s official statements are carefully worded, condemning in turn the violence of the terrorist attacks against Israel and the brutality of the reprisals. While moving closer to Israel, India also began to develop ties with Iran in the early 2000s. Before Ariel Sharon’s visit in September 2003, New Delhi had received the Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. Paradoxically, the rapprochement with Israel has given India new leverage in its Middle East policy: since they cannot be sure of India’s support, Middle East countries pay greater heed to Indian interests.

The relationship with Israel is a delicate matter for internal even more than external reasons: India needs to consider the feelings of its Muslim minority (14% of the population). It also has to take account of the left wing, heirs to the anti-imperialist tradition, who protest against any overtly pro-Israel policy. Indian decision-makers strive for discretion in their dealings with Israel, but maintaining a balance is much more difficult in times of crisis: during the Lebanon war of 2006, New Delhi at first confined itself to hesitant condemnation of Israel’s actions, then hardened its tone under pressure from the communist parties and Muslim voters. Exasperation eventually led the Indian parliament to the unanimous adoption of a resolution condemning the offensive.

At a diplomatic level, India’s hesitation over the Middle East is the result of a predictable polarisation between those who take the traditional pro-Arab position and those in favour of partnership with Israel. But it also reveals internal tension between the need to appease a minority of 160 million who make India the world’s third largest Muslim population and a fascination with Israel’s methods, which some in New Delhi would like to try against terrorist movements based in Pakistan.

\*  In the Pre-Independence period, Gandhi, Nehru and the Indian National Congress had opposed the creation of a ‘Jewish National Home’.

\*  India did not subscribe to the majority plan of United Nations Special Committee on Palestine recommending partition of Palestine.

\*  India voted against the admission of Israel into the United Nations in May 1949.

**India – Israel : The Imperatives for Strategic Cooperation**

For those who still subscribe to the old policies of domestic compulsions in terms of avoiding good relations with Israel, the imperatives for strengthening strategic cooperation needs to be spelt out.

**Indian Imperatives – The Defence Field**

\* Israel offers a valuable autonomous source for purchase of sophisticated weapons and military equipment, indigenously developed; it therefore, precludes external pressures on Israel not to supply.

\* Israel’s defence industries have earned a global reputation for upgradation of old weapon systems to latest technological capabilities. It applies to India’s vast holdings of Russian combat aircraft and tanks holdings. Israel has done it for number of countries.

\* Israel’s technological advances in the fields of satellites, satellite imagery, missiles, rockets and nuclear fields are appreciable. Most of them being indigenous developments, they can be a source of advanced technology for India.

\* Potential exists for India – Israel joint defence production and marketing of conventional military equipment. India’s under - utilised and aging defence production facilities could be modernised and upgraded for export purposes. Export earnings could subsidise India’s requirements for enhanced defence expenditure.

**Indian Imperatives – The Intelligence Field**

\* Israel from its existence recognised "that they needed excellent intelligence to aid their fight for survival. Their country was among the tiniest on earth but would have to develop the finest services in the world".8They have done so in the form of Mossad (Foreign Operations), SHIN BET (domestic security) and AMAN (Army’s Intelligence Agency). Each one of them have acquired global reputation for excellence.9 This was achieved both by the imperatives of national survival and being "a synthesis of various traditions that were learned, adopted, inherited, or copied from other countries that have longer histories as states and more deeply ingrained intelligence customs".10

\* With India facing both internal and external onslaughts from adversaries, India’s intelligence agencies need toning up. Israeli expertise would be invaluable as inputs for strenghtening of India’s intelligence agencies.

\* India is under attack from Islamic fundamentalists. Intelligence exchanges with Israel would provide valuable inputs as Israel too is under similar attacks and has developed considerable expertise in dealing with them.

\* Israeli industries produce hi-tech sensitive gadgetry for intelligence purposes. India could tap this source for its requirements.

\* India’s counter-terrorism mechanisms and responses are poor. Israel experience could help.

**India’s Imperatives – The Internal Security Field**

\* "Israel is in almost permanent state of war and has been since its birth in May 1948. It is surrounded by hostile nations and a constant, threat so the rules of defence and intelligence must differ from those that apply in America or other Western countries."11 India is in a similar predicament and the Israel experience would be valuable.

\* Israel’s border management and counter – terrorism techniques could help India in getting over its major weaknesses in internal security management.

**Israeli Imperatives for Strategic Cooperation With India**

The Israeli imperatives may not incorporate a wide a list as the Indian requirements. The major ones are:

\*  India offers vast markets for arms sales. India’s weapons and military equipment requirements in the next ten years add upto billions of dollars.

\*  India needs autonomous sources of both military equipment and technology in the fields of nuclear power generation, space technology and satellite imagery. Attractive market exists for Israel in India.

\*  Cost effective joint defence production.

\*  India is a vast market for Israel’s super speciality – agro-tech industries.

\*  Israel’s hi-tech industries could find India as an attractive market for sales, transfers and joint production and marketing.

\*  Tapping India’s advanced IT industry for both civil and military uses.

### Defence & strategic cooperation

# In 2008, Israel surpassed Russia as the largest arms supplier to India

* Rise of Islamic terrorism in both countries have generated a solid strategic alliance
* India has purchased Barak-1 missiles from Israel
  + Barak-1 has the ability to intercept anti-ship missiles such as the Harpoon
* Purchased Rafael Advanced Defence System

### Trade

* <refer pdf>

### Science and Technology

* In the areas of nanotechnology, IT, water technology, space & aeronatics, alternative energy and biotechnology
* Indo-Israel Joint Committee of scientists

### Space

* India launched a military satellite, TecSAR, for Israel through ISRO in 2008
* In 2009 India launched RISAT-2 which is based on the technology deployed in Israel’s TecSAR

# Jordon, Palestine

* <MEA pdf>

# Syria

<pdf>

* Consolidation of the political ties. India and Syria were together part of the NAM.

President Pratibha Patil visited Syria in November 2010

* First Indian President to visit Syria
* Signed three MoUs
  + On cultural cooperation for 2010-2013
  + An MoU between the General Organisation for Radio and Television in Syria and Prasar Bharti
  + An MoU between the Syrian Arab News Agency and the PTI
* Syrian President Basher-al-Assad expressed the hope that India would use UNSC forum to place the Arab case before the world.
* India is participating in power projects in India
  + More scope for economic cooperation
  + Current bilateral trade stands at only $530 mn

Yemen

* Manama dialogue

# India-Gulf

* Pg 1853, Annual Report

# UAE

* President Pratibha Patil visited in November 2010

## Economic ties

* UAE has about 1.7 mn workers from India. UAE needs Indian workers as human resource.
* Free Trade Agreement
* Bilateral trade of $43 bn (grew from $170 mn in 1970)

## Energy Security

* It is the 5th largest oil supplier (to India or to world?)
* India needs to have good relations with it for securing uninterrupted energy supply

## Strategic Ties

* Peace in the Middle-East is in India’s interest
* Defence cooperation between the two countries is increasing
* Sea lanes need to be protected because it is a very important route for India
* Anti-terror cooperation growing.

## Areas of cooperation

* UAE can cooperate in infrastructure development and energy security in India

## Arab League

Amid the West Asian and North African turmoil, the League of Arab States has begun to raise its profile, a development that bodes well for the whole region. Prompted by popular uprisings, by the Nato-inspired attempt at regime change in Libya, and by the brutalities governments in the region have inflicted on protesters, a committee of the Arab Parliament, to which the League's 22 members send representatives, has recently taken public positions on several key issues. It has proposed suspending Syria and Yemen for their failure to heed popular demands for reform and for cracking down on democratic protests. Significantly, the League rules out any call for international intervention of the kind it opportunistically approved in Libya — where, without its agreement, the continuing episode of western military adventurism would have been extremely difficult in the first place. Tripoli, however, remains suspended from the Arab body.

The League now appears to be transcending some of its constitutional constraints. It has no supranational powers or enforcement mechanisms to support its broad objective of improving coordination among members on a wide range of matters, including military ones, and it cannot override national sovereignty. As a result, rivalries and disagreements between member states, and external exploitation of these, have at times rendered the grouping almost impotent. It has also been criticised as a body that serves dictators and despots, not ordinary citizens. In 2008, however, its Arab Charter on Human Rights, which is broadly consistent with other international rights instruments, came into force, and its recent expressions of concern over Syria and Yemen mark an important departure from its earlier silence on internal repression. The Arab League can become a genuine forum for the voices of the region's many peoples. Its potential for constructive engagement stands in contrast to that of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which bases its own Declaration on Human Rights in Islam on the Sharia law and has only just abandoned a 12-year campaign to have what it called the “defamation of religions” incorporated into international human rights law. The League now has a chance to widen and deepen its forward-looking concerns — and to remind member-governments that progress towards democracy founded on the protection of human rights is a key element in political stability. That, in turn, will give greater weight to its members' calls for the creation of a Palestinian state. In sum, the Arab League's enhanced standing must be welcomed as a positive factor for the region and the world.