

IDSA-BESA Bilateral Dialogue
Non-State Armed Groups and Asian Security in the 21st Century
January 15-16, 2008, New Delhi

Inaugural Session

Introduction by Prof. Efraim Inbar: I am very happy to invite Mr. Sisodia, Director General of IDSA to deliver his inaugural address and we are of course happy that BESA delegation to be here.

Inaugural Address by Mr. N.S.Sisodia, Director, IDSA

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure in welcoming Ambassador Mark Sofer amidst us today and Efraim and his team members Shaul Shay and Mordechai Kedar. Unfortunately, one of the team members perhaps had some other preoccupation so he was unable to join, but we are very glad to have you and a very, very warm welcome to you.

IDSA and BESA have had an excellent relationship which began in 1998 and we have had six dialogues on a range of issues, this is the seventh one. I have attended one when I had just joined IDSA. I think it was in September 2005 and I recall it as a very stimulating, provocative, informative and insightful interaction. The great thing about BESA is that it constantly challenges; the great thing about BESA is that it has no ambivalence, it is direct, it is frank and it forces you to think of issues. Many of these interactions, the interactions that we have with other institutions, they are great institutions some of them, tend to be somewhat dull and predictable; we say the normal things, there are many platitudes expressed. You could almost predict what would be the analysis and what would be the conclusion, but there is a very unique excitement in our dialogue with BESA and therefore we greatly value it. We have had discussions so far on a number of issues, we started in 1998 with West Asia Peace Process and the U.S. role in Middle East and that continues to be relevant even today. In 1999 there was a discussion on trans-national terrorism and radical extremism and in 2001 there was a discussion on strengthening of India-Israel relations, then His Excellency would have some thoughts to share on this subject. Then in 2002 there was a discussion on the strategic environment after 9/11 and Perspectives on West Asia September 2005 again some perspectives on India-Israel Cooperation and threat of terrorism. Then our team went to Tel Aviv in May 2006 and there was a discussion on the rise of China, international terrorism, India-Israel relations and U.S. role in world politics. But let me say that this two-days bilateral subject is really truly interesting and I think it's extremely topical and I must complement the two sides in having so thoughtfully designed this bilateral, this can in fact be an example and model to follow for many other bilaterals that we do.

We begin this morning with a discussion on the theoretical aspects of non-state armed groups and security and thereafter there is a discussion of specific case studies and the case studies that we are taking up are Al Qaeda, Taliban, Islamic Brotherhood, Jamaah Islamiyah, Hamas, Hezbollah, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Harkat-ul-al-Islami, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, LTTE and then we round up this discussion with some consideration of who will win the future wars, non-state armed groups or the states and if so far we have not been very well as states what do we need to do in order to do better in the future? So I think it is very interesting and since it is focused it can perhaps be developed into a publication, if not right away, may be through some future work, but it's very well designed and I would complement the two sides on the thoughtful preparation for this bilateral, we are really looking forward to it. As I said this is also truly topical, in fact, as is well-known conventional wars perhaps do not cause so much violence as violence through non-state actors through armed groups which are not state directed but which are informal groups outside the ambit of state institutions. There are many common characteristics, they wage a warfare which is entirely unconventional, they have linkages which are trans-national, both in terms of their financing, their arms supplies, their communication which are now global, their ideological link sometimes, sometimes the political support that they receive from across the borders. They target civilians, they are unpredictable, they can be very arbitrary in

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their approach and they have created a certain pervasiveness, may be, I mean it's been calculated that in the half of the first decade of this century actual number of people killed through violence inflicted by non-state armed groups has been declining, it is much less than in the few years of the nineties. Nevertheless, after 9/11 there is a much greater sense of insecurity and there is a certain pervasiveness and with talks in New York, in London, in Madrid, elsewhere in the world it has greatly affected the psyche of communities both urban and those which are not strictly living in cities, that pervasive insecurity prevails everywhere. They have unconventional ways of financing, they are sometimes linked up with criminal groups, in fact, they are not subject or accountable to any law, certainly not international law, domestic law they are accountable to, but it's extremely difficult to bring them to book. So, this is a very peculiar characteristic of these non-state armed groups which gives them enormous strength vis-à-vis the states and sometimes an advantage and as they say that in order to succeed in this war the state has to win every time, but the non-state armed group has to win only once. If it's able to execute one attack successfully it has already achieved victory and the state has to protect itself at each occasion and that's what makes the entire complexion of this kind of warfare very complicated. Now, this is fairly interesting, there are certain common characteristics, it becomes very important for us to consider this because according to the statistics compiled about the non-state armed groups and this statistics of course is always an estimate. There are approximately 343 such groups, may be 350 and more than half of these operate in the Asian continent, perhaps most of these operate between Israel and India and this happens to be the theatre of intense activity of non-state armed groups today perhaps will continue to be so in the future.

Both Israel and India have a unique experience, we have both faced non-state armed groups, Israel in a much more intense fashion ever since its birth as a nation and it has faced this existence to threat all the time, many of us who have seen Israel know what a constant threat it is in and what has made Israel a kind of nation that it is today. In India we have had a somewhat different experience and many scholars say that India has a special approach to strategic because it has really not had to fight many wars although it has been invaded by outsiders but the general population has not been involved in fighting wars like the Israelis have, but in more recent years the civilian, people who are not directly concerned with warfare have also been subjected to violence and they have suffered in a variety of ways. In any case, irrespective of the divergence of our experiences there is a common that we face; Israel deals with these threats somewhat differently, we seem to be dealing this threat differently but there is much to learn from each other, much to learn from how these non-state armed groups operate, what is their philosophy, what is their ideology, what is their source of strength, what is their advantage vis-à-vis states and how can they be tackled more effectively. So this seems to be a very exciting two days of bilateral discussion, we are looking forward to it, we are looking forward to stimulating presentations from Israel and also very insightful presentations from our own scholars who have been working on some of these non-state armed groups and let us hope that this adds to our existing knowledge on the subject.

Let me conclude by welcoming amidst us His Excellency the Ambassador of Israel Mr. Mark Sofer. Let me also request him to share his thoughts both on Indo-Israel relations, his perspectives on West Asia, the West Asian peace process, other issues that he would like to speak to us about, let me also say that in this seminar hall we follow Chatham House Rules rules, fortunately or unfortunately I don't think we have any representative of the media, but even if we did have they do respect our convention so kindly be as frank as you normally are and perhaps can be without any hesitation, without any undue burdens of diplomatic constraints. We welcome you once again, I welcome all of you to this seminar and I do hope you enjoy the two days of intellectual gymnastics in this hall. Thank you very much.

Keynote Address by Mr Mark Sofer, Ambassador of Israel to India:

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Thank you very much indeed Director Sisodia for the opening remarks, I think if I might say to ask an Ambassador to be frank is very much an oxymoron in diplomatic circles and it's not easy thing for us to do. I think the last time I was frank was back in 1921, long time before I was born, but I will make an effort occasion and try and diverge little bit from what I have written since I do having nothing but greatest respect for IDSA, for BESA for the dialogue and the respect that you have Chathamhouse Rules which of course is *sine qua non* to have any type of meaningful discussion on any issue at all that I would say is point number one and point perhaps number two before I say few things. In general terms the Israel-India relationship which I have been asked to say a few worlds about is not, may be, at first sight directly connected to non-state actors in complex situations. I understand that of course, but listening to your words I do realize too, that without this cooperation between the states and I fully concur with what you say as a non-academic that the states have to win continuously but non-states only have to win once. So, therefore, I believe the state actors as a principle has to interact with other state actors of like-minded countries in order to be on a continuous victory path. Theoretically of course you can never know what the future holds, but unless we do enhance the relationships between the countries of like-minded civilizations, like-minded democracies, like-minded thinkers we may eventually lose just that particular one time and then we don't know what the future will bring on that one. So, in that respect of course the India-Israel relationship is crucial in trying as two major players fighting against non-state actors who are trying to overthrow existing *status quo* or even the statehood in our case for certain and in your case even internally I think the more that we read about some of the non-state actors here in India the more we understand what you are up against as well. So, there is a connection it is therefore very important, if I might say, to delve closely into the relationship between Israel and India which has developed over the past few years and I won't take too much of your time, but I would like to offer you some thoughts. May be a little bit critical and may be even also about what is happening in West Asia we will bring that in, how we see it in general terms, may be not how the government sees it because one of the things that I am lucky in doing here in such an audience is breaking away from the state's propaganda path which we never use anyway and I don't believe in it in principle.

I shall start by saying, I should add perhaps before I do that, I welcome very much indeed my colleagues from BESA and from the University of Bar-Illan, it's very, very crucial and important and very well-known, one of the best think-tanks we have in Israel, one which there isn't one person in Israel who has an IQ over one, who doesn't know what's existence and hasn't been involved in way or another in reading its studies on different issues especially on the Middle East and so it's a very great pleasure for us to have them here and to greet you all.

Prior to my coming to India when I first got the appointment to be here which is at the beginning of 2007 I spent about eight to ten months although I was holding another job at the same time learning about what is going on in the relationship between us in the economic field, in the political field, in the security field, culture, international cooperation, agriculture, etc. I would say hundreds of people involved in present day contemporary Israel-Indian relationship and thought when I came here that I knew quite a lot, I really did and then about three days after I arrived I had two meetings on the same day with two very different people which made me rethink to a large extent 'where we are, why we are and why things have changed'. One of the most senior Ambassadors here in India, the first one and this literally a couple of days after I arrived in Delhi, who said to me that 'if you would take the top eight or ten or so embassies in India and say who in order of importance, there would be any list at all the Israeli Embassy would figure or Israel would figure in the top ten countries here active in India or the top countries which are outstanding, not outstanding in excellence terms but which stand out more than the others' and don't forget we are a small country of 7-8 million on the one hand, on the other hand there are about a 160 countries here, I think after Washington and the United Nations, Delhi has the most amount of embassies than

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any country in the world and to hear this from literally one of the most, if not the most senior diplomat here in Delhi was something which really made you think a little bit but at the same time literally couple of hours later I met a journalist here who told me – who actually showed me – a passport he had from 1991 sixteen years ago, an Indian passport, which said 'valid for all countries except Israel'. In sixteen years what has happened was the transformation or the metamorphosis of the relationship which wasn't one from zero to fifty, but it was one you can use the word whatever would like, I don't like to use the words which are very dangerous and very bad but you can call them antagonism, the relationship was antagonistic, was perhaps hostile, was perhaps untoward, whatever you want to say, certainly not a good relationship and certainly less than zero or balanced relationship, from something which was very negative to where we are, one of the top ten interactors – India-Israel – I think that it demands much more than understanding where we are today and why is it and I think this is very important for us to understand. Why is it that things have changed from such a negative position to such an extremely positive position in sixteen years, I am not talking of sixty years, I am not talking of six hundred years, I am talking of sixteen years of a complete and utter metamorphosis in the relationship and it is very difficult to explain it in purely diplomatic terms. One has to look at it in a rather deeper term and I am not sure that I am able to do that. A recent book came out actually last week which was delivered called *Israel India Relations Towards a Strategic Partnership*. I personally don't subscribe to that, I must say and I will get to that at the end, I don't think we are in a strategic partnership and I think it would be wrong to call it a strategic partnership, but I do think that we are moving somewhere which we don't really know why it's happened and I think it's important to study this in depth, not necessarily for academic purposes, but probably concrete, real politic reasons in order to see something which has improved so quickly and something that has moved so fast from such a negative position to such a positive position, could it disintegrate at the same speed. Are things today artificial, what are the weak points, what is that before us which could cause us to be back at the *status quo ante* as we were, and I think trying to delve deeper into the history and the nature of this relationship is the only way to understand it better and with this I would like to share some thoughts with you not because they are necessarily correct, in fact, they are probably not correct, but because it allows me to deviate from the simple course of throwing out facts and figures of where we are today on the Israeli-Indian relations, how many visits, how much trade that sort of thing which is not interesting for a academic meeting of this nature. However, without a few basic facts and figures to know where we are today we cannot begin this exercise. I would say that in the past four years alone or three or four years alone we have 14 ministerial visits from both sides from senior policy makers, in fact, right now as we talk our Minister of Agriculture is here, our Minister of the Interior was here about three weeks ago, the Governor of the Bank of Israel is coming here next week, the Chief of Staff of the Indian Army or the Head of the Navy was in Israel about three weeks ago, the Deputy Minister of Railways was in Israel two weeks ago and the list goes on and on and on and on and again I say the size of Israel is about half, population about half of that of Delhi and so really trying to put it into some sort of perspective economic relations are flourishing, we have more or less today trade of somewhere between 2.7 to 2.8 billion dollars of worth of bilateral trade which isn't in itself something which makes us very not because of the diversity or the lack of diversity but I won't go into that right now unless any of you would have questions afterwards, so let's not diverge from where we are, but also because we have investment from Israeli companies in India, from Indian companies in Israel which in the last three years alone, according to our estimation, have overcome somewhere in the region of 4 to 6 billion dollars of investment in Israeli companies in India and Indian companies in Israel and the list goes on. I have here from our Embassy people who are dealing with the Agricultural Cooperation going on here [unclear] and we are embarking on a cooperation with India the likes of which we don't have anywhere else in the world, it's a three year programme or water management, etc., etc., and really I could just sit here for hours and just talk about what is happening and I would like sometimes, we live in interesting times but at the embassy it's quite difficult and I would like to probably

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easier to be Ambassador in Iceland or something, but we have to deal with this. Our embassy here and it is interesting to note by far our biggest embassy in Asia, it's about the twice size of our embassy in Beijing for example, and it's just a little bit smaller than our embassy in Washington. So you can see the size of where we are, what we are doing and where we are going.

The next issue which I think as also is very relevant to hear but one which I feel on a very shaky ground talking about; to be honest with you is the field that defence and security relationships. Again it's very relevant to the discussion that you will be having at hand, on the other hand I do feel that we are very careful indeed and this of course even over and above Chatham House Rules. We almost don't tell it to ourselves, we are at home by ourselves, talk to us about the defence relations but I can say to you that according to foreign sources which and you can cut out the world foreign sources if you want for India Israel is the second biggest supplier today of security related produce, whatever the word is, produce is probably the wrong word, manufactured security related industry and as far as Israel is concerned India is its second biggest market. So we are talking here literally of quite a bit of interaction to use the understatement of year the Indian defence budget is second or third largest in the world and so if we put all this together we get quite a lot of interaction in the field of defence related cooperation, but I think what is more important in this respect is that we are moving away and this for me is more important, we are moving away from solely buying and selling which is the harmony of interest, we have goods which India needs and vice versa into a much more closer relationship on issues of the type of which you will be dealing in this seminar in the next three days, both exchange of military personnel, a deeper and closer relationship is carrying on day by day and I think that we are both happy about that. Of course, it's a win-win situation.

I think also in the field of politics which is something that we cannot also put aside India's approach to West Asia to the Middle East conflict has undergone a transformation. If we look at where the Congress Party was just about sixteen years ago, the famous passport which couldn't get into Israel, the Indian passport and if you look at the speeches made by not too long ago, 20 years ago, 23 years ago by Indira Gandhi or others on the Middle East and you look at the speech made by Kapil Sibal the Indian representative to the Annapolis meeting just about a month ago which I have here and I must say honestly which I probably could have made myself. Both sides really very balanced approach to the Middle East, both sides need to that, both needs to do that, this; a very neutral, a very balanced speech and one which is a problematic speech on India's policy towards West Asia and I think this really shows where we are and the list goes on and on. So what's happened and why is happened? And in fact I would say that much of the conventional wisdom – we always talk about conventional wisdom – but an academics it's their job and they are much better at it than diplomats trying to find out like I mentioned the wisdom is wrong. In our case that conventional wisdom to a large extent is correct. On the face of it when India was established in 1947 and Israel I 1948 there was a lot in common between them and we could have had excellent relationships from Stage I, both countries extricated themselves from a former common colonial overlord, both underwent a process of partition and not an easy one, both had neighbours which were not – how can we say this – exactly palatable to them and to either of them, not a very nice neighbourhood I would say, two democratic countries which have chosen democracy as the form of government to move them forward and note these two countries if you recall at that time Israel was certainly trying to embark at that time on very much non-aligned course, not part of the Russian or the West orbit, not part of the Eastern orbit which was of course at the time of the cold-war, but very much as a non-aligned, two countries looking for non-aligned and of course in international politics theoretically the two countries really close on Stage I but they weren't they weren't because these common characteristics were really not strong enough to overcome the factors pulling completely in the other direction and which led India to strike a course which brought it away I think from Israel and as a consequence

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India voted, as you know, against the establishment of the State of Israel in 1947 and in 1948 took a very strong pro-Arab line for many years to come and this was of course in zero-sum equation that existed at the time and which I would strongly argue and I will try and argue that later especially if you any questions on it, but it doesn't exist today in the Middle East the 'zero-sum equation' as far as Israel and the Palestinians are concerned, but then it did. I think these factors which pulled it in the other direction first and foremost I must say Pakistan, this is a conventional wisdom and if conventional wisdom is correct the Indian government at that time quite rightly I must say from its point of view saw that Pakistan as a Muslim country you have to mainly, perhaps in order to stop the Arab world and the Muslim world from coming wholly on the side of Pakistan which is a Muslim country against India you had to be in what you would say holier than Pope, I apologise I am being a little bit blunt on this one, but if you are not holier than the Pope in this particular or the Chief Rabbi, I am not trying to make it political or religious equation here, then you have to go that much farther in order to stop the drive of the Islamic world, of the Arab world, in the direction of Pakistan and all that you have to do that you have to take a rather strong and strident position on the State of Israel.

I think the second point which is very commonly used but not commonly understood in Israel is the issue of the Muslim community in India which is 10% or was at the time it still is more as I would say about 10% something along that nature at the time I think 50 million strong, now may be 150 nobody really knows for certain, 50 million strong Muslims. In Israel I heard it very often that o.k. you have 10% of the population is Muslim in Israel, you have 18% of the population more or less that is Muslim in France, you have approximately 12% that today is that is Muslim and that doesn't necessarily push you in the direction of taking a course which is an entirely curtail or boiling down to the Muslim community because of 10% that means 90% (nine zero) are not Muslims. So why is it that the Muslim 10% have such a strong impact on the West Asia policy of India at that time and we hear this a lot from Israeli commentators, I heard this very, very often and it shows a rather large lack of understanding on behalf of the Israeli academics to a large extent. I think that they don't understand the depth of the Islamic history and culture and within Indian society which is much more than a numerical figure of 10%. If 10% of the French are Muslim it doesn't have the same in-built history, mentality, cultural effect on the regular man and woman in France as the Muslim culture, identity and minority have had in India. It's much deeper than this 10% number that is thrown out and therefore the thinking of the government towards the Muslim minority is much stronger in India than it would be in other countries which have a 10% or more Islamic minority and therefore one can understand in better terms, I won't go too much into detail, one can understand in terms why the Muslim community in India has such a strong effect governmental policy on issues which are important for the Muslim community especially West Asia. I think the third reason pulling in your direction against Israeli-Indian relations this time was purely ideological, I think the Indian government, and tell me if I am wrong here, had an almost religious devotion to secularism and many found it difficult Israel or to look towards Israel because they saw it at a time right or wrong, my guess it's wrong, but it doesn't matter perception is more important. In fact, that Israel was a state based on what they saw as a religious foundation, a Jewish state, there shouldn't be based states based on Jewish or on religious. It was a wrong perception and I would say this openly, it was wrong, but it was a perception and you cannot deny it and therefore it was there. And I think many of the Indian leaders at the time and certainly later at under Bandung they saw the role for India as a world player, a world power, you needed a platform for that, that platform was Bandung those the non-aligned nationhood, the non-aligned nations were basically run by Nehru, Tito and erstwhile friend at the time Nasser, a pan-Arabist who wouldn't have any truck at all with Israel and if India at that time wants to move forward, they have no choice choice but to take Nasseristic pan-Arab approach in this 'zero-sum game' that we were talking about. Again, this was the policy approached in stronger or greater degree until 1992 when things completely changed and what brought about this diplomatic explosion.

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Then, again the obvious reasons why this happened which frankly are true of the collapse of the bi-polar international system at the time rendered the non-aligned movement superfluous to a large extent at the time again, probably a lot of you today and you will know this better than I do that the world seemed to be uni-polar, uni-polar being an American led world, Israel firmly and constantly in the American camp as it had grown to be since it was not allowed to be in the non-aligned or in the Soviet camp and had very close relations with the West at the time and still does as a matter of fact and this was the only ball game in town India was looking to improve its relations with the United States, the international arena had changed, the time had become right, the Madrid Conference of 1991 which began to transform West Asia, I think this was the first major movement of the Middle East from a 'zero-sum game' what is good for Israel is bad for the Arabs, what is good for the Arabs is bad to Israel into what we had believed strongly, and many would disagree with me Israel, certainly academics, but I certainly believe this into what we see today is no longer 'zero-sum game' in West Asia but more a win-win situation of what is good for one has to be good for the other or else you won't move forward at all. In other words we have to look at this as a holistic approach rather than 'me against you' and 'we have to win'. Yet while this might go some way to explain the timing of establishment of relations between Israel and India, you have to remember two other points which caused this diplomatic explosion which brings us to more or less where we are today. First of all, India never despite its very, very strongly pro-Arab approach from 1947-48 to 1992 which is a long period of time it never adopted the extremist demand for the liquidation of the State of Israel, it never endorsed the Arab position of refusing to negotiate with Israel and I think these two things are very important indeed. In fact, we had recognition of Israel by India in 1950 but nonetheless it never materialized over and above that. Second, and this is perhaps more important, I believe, there has always been a groundswell of support for Israel within Indian society even at the time when the government was taking a very anti or pro-Arab position. This is not only true of some of the political parties in India, the BJP or the SJP or the Janata Party and others, but I think it's very, very true indeed that large parts of Indian public opinion which looked at Israel's technological advances, agriculture, culture, economic advantage, hi-tech and with a large amount of ore and this was reflected to a large extent I think in the Indian Press which if you look, if you examine the way the Israeli Press lauded or talked of the establishment of relations and you examine the way the Indian Press surprisingly the Indian Press was much more overwhelmed, was much more positive about the establishment of relations than the Israeli Press was at that time and this has been something that we have been striving for 40 years or 44 years and nonetheless the Indian newspapers, the Times of India the biggest paper, the English language paper came out 'Shalom Israel' was the headline of the day of the establishment, etc., etc., etc., and I have the articles here. And so it felt I think when the time was ripe and things did come out and burst out into the open, it was like taking the lid off a bubbling saucepan or cauldron or something of that nature and then the flourishing of the relations really took part.

I think it's also important to remember that despite this burgeoning of our relationship it's not without its difficulties, we have quite a few difficulties in present day relations between India and Israel. There are still quite a few here in India, including people in influential positions, including journalists from time to time we read them, who haven't extricated themselves from the old style of thinking and continue to view us in black and white, in the Middle East in black and white. I read recently in another think-tank a very interesting speech made by somebody who I really won't mention here, most of you have read it and an important person in India who said that Israel has three aims in the Middle East: one aim is to dominate the entire Arab world, the other is to render any Palestinian state completely and utterly irrelevant and the third is to make the Palestinians so weary, so tough as to beat them into submission. And I really strongly believe, I think people who are true Middle East watchers and who are looking what's going on, it doesn't matter from the Left, the Right or the Centre, we have moved away from this about 35 to 40 years ago. We are not in the situation anymore, neither we

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aren't, neither the Arabs. We are in a completely different ball game right now in the Middle East and yet there are still quite a few people that are yet to pull themselves away from where we were in the past. I think there are a lot of people in Israel who are quite upset, again we can argue about this, I don't know how much more time I have and which I won't too much quite upset about India's relations with Iran. I hear this quite a lot, I think it to a large extent shows may be a little bit of a lack of understanding may be to the traditional and historical relations between India and Iran on the one hand and on the other hand the energy needs of India which are very important. However, I am not always sure and this is Chatham House Rules so I can say this openly please, and I hope it's respected I am not always sure India understands where Israel is coming from on the Iranian issue. I don't always feel in my discussions here in India that the full depth, and I heard quite a lot of them on this issue, it's a very hot issue here, the full depth of the – I don't know if it's fear – but certainly the portend of things to come which could happen when we have this conglomeration of a President calling for the eradication of a member state of the United Nations, of a President who is clearly striving to get some sort of nuclear capability and we can argue and I will argue always that it's a nuclear weapons capability but it's not important at this particular time and place and the whole *raison de etre* being it etc., of the State of Israel. One can make every possible speculation in the book and one can look at every academic reason how he may be, doesn't call the shots and may be he is not trying to do this, may be the NIE report is right, may be the NIE report is wrong we don't have as you said earlier the luxury of speculation here, this is not an academic exercise and what happens if we are wrong and that he really does intend to get nuclear weapons or not [inaudible] Indian commentators because I don't think we are wrong, to be honestly I don't think we are wrong, even on Chatham House or non-Chatham House rules I think that here we are taking the correct approach and this is an existential threat to the State of Israel and an existential threat to the State of Israel doesn't allow anybody the luxury, the luxury of treating it in any other way but the worst case scenario and the worst case scenario is that he intends to do what he actually plans to do. I am not sure that position is always understood here in India who look at it mainly from, which is normal, you are looking at it from the Indian point of view and we are looking at it from our point of view. I don't think that Ahmedinijad or any Iranian leader is threatening to eradicate the State of India and I think if he did may you would look at it in a different terms or the same type of terms that we tend to look at these things stage. So, we do have this type of differences of opinion which are normal in any relationship, but I do really believe that the relationship between Israel and India has passed by far the point of no return and actually why I think that. And not in any order of importance, but first of all I think India has changed. Again, this is not most of important of all, but first of all using it as an example. Bi-partisan, both Congress, BJP, Left, Right it is taking a much more balanced approach in international issues incidentally not vis-à-vis Israel, not vis-à-vis West Asia but vis-à-vis the United States. Who would have believed for example 20 years ago, 15 years ago that the Congress Party would pursuing a civilian nuclear agreement with the United States. Who would have believed it, it was all that unthinkable to talk in those in terms and yet the party pushing for it most of all is the Congress Party and I think it has to be seen in what it is. It is again it's national policy which is bi-partisan, I really think it is healthy because India is moving to the camp of where it should have been or it really needs to find itself that democratic, civilized which is what it is, which is where India and this is where we are coming from as well so I think it portends well and in the lack of non-aligned world-ness right now it's very good. I don't see violation of that policy under any circumstances. Second of all, Israel has changed. I think it would be silly of us to say that we haven't, we have changed completely. I remember, in the early 1990s and the late eighties in East Jerusalem or in parts of the West Bank at the time of the heightened of the Intifada and things were very, very strong if somebody was looked around with a Palestinian flag it was illegal, I was talking about less than 20 years ago, even a watermelon – a watermelon has the colours of the Palestinian flag Green, Yellow, etc. – that was considered sort an act of, Oh my goodness this is a bit strange. I have seen reports in the newspaper in the Israeli press of this, to us it is

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irrelevant. What is true is true is then there was deep anathema in Israel of what needs to be done in the Middle East and look at where we are today. A two-state solution, undoubtedly the feeling of the vast body politick of Israeli public opinion to a large extent in the Knesset as well, State of Palestine living alongside the State of Israel, I think that Israeli politics has changed, Israeli public opinion has changed, we are in a different world, on a different planet to where we were in West Asia just about 20 years ago, 18 years ago this is clear from Madrid, Oslo, etc., etc., and certainly the roadmap of Annapolis or whatever. Thirdly, the Arab the world has changed, the Arab world has changed, they don't deny it although they don't trumpet it. Again, I am not trying to be derogatory, any terms whatsoever I don't it's the right way of dealing with serious and mature thinkers but in the Arab world of dealing with self-criticism, self-examination is not something which pushes them into any type of direction of change. If you don't have public debate on issues if you cannot write, for example, in the Egyptian newspapers or the Syrian newspapers as you will, then if somebody wants to write that President Assad is really talking rubbish and he has no idea what he is doing on the Middle East or in West Asia. If someone were to write that there is no way it would be published and second of all there is no way this man or woman would stay outside of prison for two long. That is one of the problems of non-democratic societies where there is no public debate and incidentally in Israel you find this and in India I must you find this everyday in the newspapers and I think that's healthy. But even without this self-examination no doubt whatsoever that the Arab world has moved on from where it was. We are no longer in the field of the pan-Nasserist or the pan-Arabic, what all the Arabs want to throw all the Jews into the sea it's a load of rubbish and people who think that, I strongly disagree that there still people who think that. I strongly disagree there are among the more fundamentalist types those who do. Having said that I don't believe that the Arab is not ready for accommodation with Israel, I think Annapolis has shown that, but not only Annapolis the visit of even Bush which is trumpeted as a failure, his visit to the Middle East I don't know if it was, going from Israel to Saudi Arabia to Egypt, Kuwait, etc., it's not a common issue at all. I think that all the signs show that it's moving. Fourthly, and I think no less important than that, the Middle East is moving inexorably and again we can argue about this is, this not may be the forum for this towards peace. It's an edifice based on chicken legs, it's edifice based on fear. You talked earlier of non-state actors and I think non-state actors really can derail any process at this stage of where we are. When we look at that is happening, even by accident, not even by design when we are looking at the southern parts of Israel where we are bombarded daily by rockets attacks by, I would non-state actors certainly non-state actors, by luck, by nothing else but luck, these rockets which are totally unguided haven't hit a hospital, haven't hit a school, killed, really perish the thought, 50 young boys and girls who were only playing in the kindergarten or in a hospital it's pure and utter luck. But if we are talking about non-state actors with the possibility of derailing the need to being state-actors together and how to act against them I think this is really one prime and excellent example, the example of the Hamas in Gaza and I know it's going to be discussed in the next couple of days in much closer depth than I can. And fifthly, I think bilateral relations between us by far the point of no return and that's why a part and parcel of what I mentioned before. The amount of agreements we have. Kargil I think to large extent of military and defence related issues earlier, Kargil was the watershed as far Israeli-Indian security relationships were concerned when India found itself in troubles as far as the Kargil episode was concerned, there was only one country that came or the main country that came to India's help at the time of crisis was Israel. It changed both in the way the issue moved, back military but more important in the thinking of the political and military thinkers here in India. So, this is not as I said earlier strategic relationship and I don't know if it ever will be, I don't it every will be. It certainly won't be as long as the Middle East is unsolved, it will not be, it cannot be because India's historic and traditional relationship with the Arab will never dissipate, I don't think we should expect it to or that we want it to, I think India shouldn't under any circumstances downgrade or deteriorate its relationship with the Arab world. I hope it doesn't. I think what this has become the India-Israel relationship in meeting to a large

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extent is exacerbating it, it was enhancing it, is a normal relationship, it's a normal relationship between two countries where interests often coincide. We have here the Deputy Head of the National Security Institute of Israel, just about a month and a half ago we had here the previous Head Elam Israfi who I know very well indeed, his previous one had even been here as well. We have an ongoing dialogue, this is the interface between security and political relationships, the National Security Council is here, in India it's an extremely important organization, in Israel it looks like it's going to become one as well with the new thinking after the various reports that have come out and I would say that we have moved into a normalcy mode and I think now that West Asia offers some hope and India has taken a balanced approach, I think what has basically happened or what makes this into a normal relationship is that we don't allow, none of us, political differences to encroach on the day to day issues which are basically the bread and butter of two states' interaction – economic issues, agricultural cooperation, cultural issues, visits on how to enhance what is ultimately the important part of international relations which is people to people, ties – we have reached a stage where this passport which stopped people to people or where the Israeli approach or whatever which may have hindered in Indian eyes one way or the other the people to people approach this is behind us, it will not return. I don't know if it will develop more, I don't think so and frankly it's not so important, it's really not important for me, what is important is that we can deal with the real issues of economics and culture and issues of that nature including and perhaps most importantly how to together tackle the trials and tribulations facing both of our countries in the field of violence, in the field of the fact that are both living in absolutely lousy neighbourhoods, you with failed states and problematic states around you, us with quite a number of non-state actors and state actors around Israel are trying to undermine the mere existence of us. So, with those thoughts I would like to stop. I have managed to do it three minutes before I was asked to. Thank you very much indeed for listening.

Prof. Efraim Inbar: Any questions, we are into the Q&A period, I am sure the Ambassador would be glad to elaborate.

Gen. Sandhu: I am from the USI. Thank you your Excellency for a wonderful peep into the development of relations. I have two points. The first one is an observation which I would like to share. While agreeing with you totally as to what has been the historical reason, how India-Israel relationship had more negative aspects than anything else, historically. I feel one of the reasons which impacted on the Indian view was the Arab-Israel relationship. It wasn't so much that the India-Israel relationship which evolved but it was more a result of the Israel-Arab relationship which impacted on Indian policy but that's a historical fact and it's an observation. Secondly, I would request your Excellency to share your views, what are the prospects of developing India-Israel relations in the field of education; you talked of agriculture, trade, commerce but I think education is a field which is bringing the world closer and would you like to share your views on that. Thank you.

Ambassador Mark Sofer: Interesting you should mention that when I gave in my credentials to the President the question she asked actually, the only question which she asked all of us, there was three of us at the time, four of us at the time, Ambassadors giving their credentials was what can we do to enhance educational ties between the countries concerned, one was Holland, one was Japan and Israel, not three unimportant or unknown quantities in various fields. What can we do in the field of education? This was really what was interesting to her and since I have heard it on about three or four occasions from senior Indian officials that I had met, so I think you really have chosen the issue which is one of the most important on the other hand one of the most difficult to tackle as far as we are concerned and I will be honest with you, not because we don't want to tackle it but we are not quite sure how to. In the first place there are a quite a number of Indians studying in Israel as you know in the Bar-Illan University for example about 40 to 50 post-doctoral students in different other universities as well in the White's

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institute in Technion, in the various scientific institutions of Israel there are a number of them. To be honest with you while this is wonderful and we couldn't encourage it more there are two difficult issues which I feel are problematic. Number one is money, it's very easy to get money for information campaigns for I don't know what but not for the nitty-gritty which is like scholarships, things of that nature it's very, very difficult indeed to find the funds for that. We are trying to work with some of the Israeli business that are working here to set up a scholarship system. We have spoken to about three of them already, right now we are talking about the big league, the first league multi-national concerns not SMEs or small and medium enterprises but try and set up funds for the movement. That's number one, number two and I cannot deny this unless you get to the level of post-doctoral which is a very high level, unless any lower level you will find yourself with problems of language. In Israel the language of instruction is not English, certainly not Hindi. Although you should know that Hindi is taught in the Hebrew University at Jerusalem and which is important and we are trying to get Hebrew to be taught here and we are looking at JNU about a chair of Israel studies here. But the fact of the matter is you have two problems here, one of money – funds which is a very big problem – and the other one of language. I don't think they are insurmountable but they are not easy to deal with. I think what we need to do as a small country in the field of education is to look more closely at the specific niches rather than how can we educate India, you are 1.1, 1.2 billion or how can you educate Israel because I think to a large extent we are oriented towards studies in the United States, in Britain, in Europe for example and I don't know how many, if at all, how many Israeli students there are in India right now. But I think that the field of education is crucial. We are still working on it, we don't know what to do and I think it would be pointless for me to sit here and say I have all the answers to all the questions, I don't. I know that I am a genius and I know that there is nobody clever than I am and there never has been and there never will be, but even I must admit that I have no real concrete ideas of how to get this to be a serious ongoing proposition which will stand at the forefront of our relations, I don't know and so what we will do is we will consult with a number of universities here, we will consult with the Ministry of Education, we will consult with our own universities which is at the forefront of our education system of course as well and see how we can find the funds and necessary path, probably we will work on a niche based system which is another way, we do not teach everything or not to work on education and everything but may be specific issues, probably if you ask me more in the field of hi-tech rather than in the field of others, I don't know. It's a difficult one and was hoping you would ask me an easy question like 'when will peace break out in the Middle East'?

Next Questioner: You mentioned about the bilateral defence ties which are kept in the closet, I mean, I do understand the Indian position why they would not go to town to talk about it, but what is the compulsions from Israel side. I thought this is something you would be publicly acknowledging because it obviously translates from 1948 to 2007 there has been a long journey and a journey which I think Israel has been very keen to pursue. What are those compulsions from your side?

Ambassador Mark Sofer: Well, I think one of the misapprehensions in India in a macro terms is that has been – not only in India recently – you see it all over the world, this is my seventh diplomatic mission, so I have been everywhere South America, Northern Europe, United States and basically all over is that countries or embassies are whatever they are in the point scoring brigade, how can we show how great we are, how can we show how bad the other side is and things of nature and I believe that's completely the wrong approach. I am not here in India or anywhere actually to show how great Israel is and how wonderful we are, of course, as a 'be all' and 'and all' of what we try to do here. Think at the final analysis, we have to look at what we are trying to do and what we are trying to do together. We have common interest in the field of security, these common interests are something which is between any two states, in the field of security are not public and they shouldn't be as a matter of fact not only because we both have difficulties with some of our neighbours and it's probably

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better to not to publicize this type of issue, but also because at the end of the day there is a quite a bit of planning involved, there is a quite of bit of opposition inside and outside. And there is opposition inside of India, we are not stupid enough to hide ourselves away from this, you have quite an active Community Party here which is still as we spoke earlier of, two Communist Parties here active ones in the coalition which still leave in, to be honest with you, and again I shouldn't make any point of view on internal Indian politics and I really don't have one but their positions generally speaking are akin to those that I was talking about earlier of 'black' 'white' 'left' 'good' 'evil' or whatever that sort of thing. It's not only in Community Party there are lot of people who believe that in other parts. We have a quite a growing relationship with Communist Parties here, it's not true that they are tabooing or they have placed Israel under taboo, it's absolutely not the case we have a quite a lot of meetings with them as we do with the Muslims in India. So, there is a much greater depth of intellectual approach here in India than there is in many other parts of the world. Nonetheless, this is not the type of thing you make public. We don't make it private, in other words, the main fact that all about you know about, the main fact that we already know about is is proof that from time to time things are out in the press, they are out in the public. We had a high ranking visit of the Ministry of Defence about three weeks ago, we have what's called the Joint Working Group between Israel and India in the field of defence related issues and the Indian government brought out a official press statement on this. So, it's not a secret, it's not swept under the table, it's not something that we keep as sort of our hidden mistress or whatever, not at all. On the other hand, we are trying, both of us Israel and India to strike the fine line between too much and nothing. And I think that we have found this fine line in the sense that everybody knows there is a strong and burgeoning relationship on the one hand and the details of this relationship are really quiet, they are not so relevant as a matter of fact. Nobody really asked me about how much real estate is being bought up by Israeli companies here in India and it's billions, it's probably not less than others or how many hi-tech companies being bought up in Israel recently or the State Bank of India which just opened a branch in Tel Aviv, etc., etc., and we are talking of a great deal. This is the one which is people are much more interested in obviously that one which I think we have to tread more carefully in dealing with in any field.

End of Inaugural Session