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Hindus and Jews: Natural Partners for Peace and Pluralism

This month, an Indian rocket (PSLV) will blast into space and loft Israel's most sophisticated military reconnaissance satellite, named Polaris. This satellite is expected to keep an eagle eye on weapons sites in Iran and Syria. The PSLV rocket will also launch an Indian observation satellite, which will watch Pakistan and China.

It is a tangible example of two great democracies, India and Israel, working together to protect themselves and the civilized world against aggressive totalitarian regimes. It is also a drastically overdue step in a dangerous world where freedom is in short supply.

Until the early 90s, these two nations found themselves on different sides of the Cold War. American support for the Islamic dictatorship in Pakistan embittered democratic India, drawing her closer to the Soviet Union, and killing prospects for meaningful engagement with US-allied Israel.

Additionally, India since her Independence was governed by leftist governments dominated by the Congress party, which won elections partly by catering to a shrill Muslim minority. These governments systematically defied the wishes of the Hindu majority and refused to embrace Israel.

This changed in 1998, when a representative government dominated by the BJP party finally overcame threats of Islamist violence and achieved power. One of the first foreign policy moves made by the BJP was to adhere to the wishes of the Hindu majority and establish close military and strategic relations with Israel.

Traditionally in South Asia, Hindu kingdoms have sheltered and supported Jewish immigrants. Significant Jewish populations have resided in India for three thousand years; in fact, it is a little known fact that Hindu India bears the unique distinction as the only culture where there has never been any anti-Semitism.

Populations of Jews fled to India from the Middle East to escape Muslim persecution. Portuguese Christian missionaries in colonies like Goa and parts of Kerala launched an Inquisition against Jews, driving many out of these areas and into Hindu kingdoms for protection. Interestingly, these same missionaries tortured and forcibly converted many Hindus.

In contemporary South Asia, anti Semetic hate has arisen from both Pakistani terror groups like LeT, which has declared Jews and Hindus as enemies of Islam, and domestic Muslim leaders like Imam Barkati of Calcutta's Tipu Sultan mosque.

Hindu leaders, excluding leftist elements sympathetic to Islamist groups, have always been strong supporters of Zionism and Israel. The great freedom fighters Savarkar and Ram Sita Goel were outspoken supporters of Zionism. Politician Arun Shourie supported Israel's legitimate struggle against terrorism and spearheaded Indian ties with her sister democracy.

In Canada, the Hindu Conference of Canada last summer led a coalition of Hindu groups in an anti-terror rally in front of the Indian consulate, where support for Israel's measured response against Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon was expressed. HCC also supported the 'Stand Up for Israel' rally in North York.

Canadian Hindus, by building on fraternal ties with Jews, are honoring tradition. Hinduism, like Judaism, does not believe in aggressive prosletization, and has never invaded another nation.

The tolerance of Hinduism towards other faiths is both a blessing and a curse: our peaceful nature has been used by others to invade and perpetrate genocides and forced conversions. At the same time, the tolerant Hindu nature is the only reason why India is the world's largest democracy.

It is only natural that our community would gravitate towards a nation and a people who share our values of democracy, human rights, and pluralism.

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