

India-Israel Relations: The Blooming Aspects of Cooperation

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Abstract

The design of this research paper is to conduct a meticulous analysis of the evolution of strategic alliances between India and Israel, with an emphasis on exploring the multifaceted factors that have facilitated the evolution of their relationship from the period of divergence to the convergence era. The two nations have collaborated in various strategic sectors, including defense, counterterrorism, geopolitical, and economic objectives, which has led to the unprecedented strengthening of their alliance. The comprehensive strategy of the alliance between India and Israel is a symbiotic relationship that prioritizes improving the appropriateness and efficacy of cooperation across various life domains. This outline concludes that this alliance is a forward-thinking and progressive partnership that has allowed both countries to take significant strides in scientific research, technological development, agriculture, water resource management, trade, tourism, research and development, and cultural exchange. In conclusion, this academic paper underscores and highlights the importance of the strategic alliance between India and Israel as a consequential partnership that has evolved over the years, resulting in a close-knit relationship between the two nations. This paper emphasizes the significance of comprehending the manifold factors of the convergence between India and Israel, given the alliance in the current geopolitical arena.

Keywords: India; Israel; Strategic Partnership; Counterterrorism; Defence; Tourism

Pre-Diplomatic Recognition Era

After gaining independence in May 1948, Israel acknowledged India as a burgeoning power in Asia and a potential leader among neutral and non-aligned states, notwithstanding Israel's recent establishment as a state. Nehru and Gandhi were highly esteemed figures among the leaders of Israel and played a significant role in shaping the perception of the Jewish state.

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Despite being non-Muslims, both leaders garnered significant esteem from the Arab community. The Jewish state held optimistic expectations that these leaders would be enthusiastic to alleviate Arab animosity and foster cooperation between these communities. However, they declined to indulge in this prospect during the mid-1950s (Beecher, 1963). The primary objective of the Israeli Foreign Ministry during the initial years of independence was to diligently seek diplomatic acknowledgement from Asian nations. India ranked first on Israel's list of Asian countries for establishing relations, as Israel anticipated that India's recognition would facilitate Israeli political and commercial endeavours in Asia. (Eytan, 1958). Israel sought to forge strong ties with India to join an alliance of non-aligned nations, having India as its primary leader after its independence. Conversely, although paradoxical, Israel did not prioritise its connections with Asian countries, especially India, on an international level (Medzini, 1993). Israel's primary objective was to protect its security, geographical integrity, and national identity on the global level (Neuberger, 1992). In the Knesset, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion highlighted that we must never forget that we cannot import military hardware from Asia or Africa for the Israeli defence forces (Brecher, 1963).

In 1948, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Sharett, submitted an official plea to Prime Minister Nehru to recognize their nascent state. However, India, in spite of a formal request for acknowledgment from President Chaim Weizmann, succumbed to the pressure exerted by Arab states, particularly Egypt, and ultimately refused to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel. The decision was primarily driven by India's desire to maintain its non-aligned status and avoid being drawn into the Arab-Israeli conflict, which was perceived as a potential threat to India's regional strategic interests (Rao, 1972). According to the report submitted by Israeli Ambassador to Washington Eliyahu Eilat during his visit to the United States in October 1949, India's Muslim minority played a vital role in shaping its stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue. Eilat's report aligns with the theory of domestic politics, which suggests that domestic factors, such as the interests and opinions of minority groups, can significantly influence a state's foreign policy.

In the early 1950s, India harboured concerns that extending recognition to Israel could potentially estrange the Arab world, particularly Egypt, from India. India expressed concerns that extending recognition may potentially have adverse effects on its diplomatic relations with Pakistan, a predominantly Islamic country. India was concerned about Pakistan's endeavours to establish a pan-Islamic bloc and amplify Arab nations' opposition to Israel. India recognised

the need to assist Arab nations in their conflict with Israel to gain their support and sympathy (Rao, 1972). The Jewish State of Israel has consistently requested formal recognition from the Indian government as a sovereign Jewish state. Despite this, the Indian government has thus far refrained from granting recognition due to significant pressure from Arab nations. Prime Minister Nehru has acknowledged the requests for recognition from Israel, but we advise against taking action on this matter for now. India cannot actively participate in this conflict through diplomatic channels or otherwise (Parthasarathy, 1985). India's initial opposition to the admission of the State of Israel to the United Nations in 1949 can be attributed to its foreign policy of non-alignment, which aimed to maintain neutrality and independence in the context of Cold War politics. However, India's eventual recognition of Israel on September 17, 1950, can be seen as a pragmatic decision that was made after receiving guarantees from Arab states that it would not affect their amicable relations. Despite its deviation from typical diplomatic procedures, this recognition did not form complete diplomatic ties between the two countries, as India continued to maintain its pro-Arab stance in the Middle East (Padmanabhan).

According to Medzini (1976), Israel's primary objective was establishing diplomatic and formal relations with India. This strategic move was deemed crucial to Israel's larger scheme of gaining greater global recognition and support from other Asian nations. Furthermore, Israel sought to address its lingering border disputes with Arab countries, which had been a source of significant political tension in the region. The establishment of diplomatic ties with India was envisioned as a means to integrate with other Asian nations, thereby countering the growing political hostility and economic boycotts imposed on it by neighbouring Arab nations. This strategic manoeuvre can be seen as a calculated attempt by Israel to expand and consolidate its diplomatic leverage on a global scale (Klieman, 1990).

The 1956 Suez Canal Military Operation marked a significant turning point in relations between India and Israel. The operation, which was not communicated to Israeli diplomat Sharet prior to his meeting with Prime Minister Nehru in New Delhi, resulted in a strong condemnation of Israel's aggressive military tactics and overreaching policies by Nehru. Sudha Rao's analysis of the aftermath of the operation highlights the erosion of India's support for Israel, which had previously been closely aligned with the ideology and values of the Indian National Congress Party and Indian intellectuals. Israel's socialist and egalitarian principles, which formed the basis of its establishment, were highly compatible with those of the Indian National Congress. However, the Suez Canal Crisis marked the beginning of a growing

distance between the two nations. Despite the many factors supporting friendly relations between the two, including shared values and ideologies, geopolitical circumstances forced them to drift apart. The failure of Indian foreign policy to show greater flexibility and creativity during pivotal moments ultimately contributed to this unfortunate outcome, which deprived India of an opportunity to play a role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nonetheless, the enduring courage and humanist ideology of the Jewish people, which embody Gandhi's values, remain a source of inspiration and admiration for many in India (Rao, 1972).

During Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's second term, the Indian government took a hardline and antagonistic approach towards Israel. This was evident when the Israeli Consul in Bombay was declared *persona non grata* in July 1982, following his criticism of India's policies. The India-Israel relationship deteriorated due to several factors, including Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981, the destruction of Iran's nuclear reactor in June 1981, and the negative global reaction to its military operation in Lebanon in 1982. India's historical ties with the Arab world, its desire to maintain its Non-Aligned Movement credentials, and its strategic interests in West Asia were all factors that motivated this shift in orientation (Shimoni, 1991). During August of 1988, the American Jewish community and Congressman Stephen Solarz pressured Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to elevate the Israeli Vice-Consul in Bombay to the diplomatic position of Consul. This resulted in Israel and India establishing indirect contact in Washington and New York in December of the same year. Yossef Hadas, Israel's Director General of Foreign Affairs, visited India during that same month and met with the Minister of External Affairs, Narasimha Rao. Despite this, Indian officials labelled the visit as a tourist visit, and the meeting concluded without any positive diplomatic outcomes (Yegar, Govrin, & Oded, 2002).

On January 22, 1992, the Israeli Consul in Bombay was extended a courteous invitation for a meeting with J.N. Dixit, the distinguished Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, in New Delhi. During the meeting, Dixit conveyed the Indian government's intent to augment the quality of its relations with the State of Israel. In response, the Israeli Consul expressed gratitude for India's interest and emphasised that Israel would be honoured to establish full diplomatic relations with India. Such a diplomatic overture would enable India to participate in the working groups of the multilateral channel of the peace process in the Middle East, which would undoubtedly serve the interests of both our great nations. This is a testimony to both nations' diplomatic maturity sagacity, and commitment to a peaceful

resolution of the conflict in the region (Yegar, Govrin, & Oded, 2002). India recognised that to become a consequential stakeholder in the intricate web of the Middle East peace process and negotiations, it had to pave the way for establishing cordial and substantive diplomatic relations with Israel. This move would have significant implications for India's foreign policy orientation and regional power dynamics. This move underscores India's strategic calculations to leverage its soft power and diplomatic outreach to expand its influence in the region, while also seeking to balance its interests with various stakeholders and mitigate potential risks and challenges (Naaz, 1999).

Normalising Relationships and Post-Recognition

Crucial national interests and strategic objectives drove India's shift in foreign policy towards Israel. The Indian foreign policy analysts took diplomacy and micro-international politics into account. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of a bipolar world, which had a profound impact on Indian foreign policy. As such, its leadership deemed it necessary to redefine and reorient its foreign policy in response to the changing global landscape towards Israel (Pant, 2004). On January 28, 1992, the Indian government attempted to improve diplomatic relations with Israel just one day before establishing bilateral relations. This attempt aimed to ensure India's active participation in the Middle East peace process. The Indian government promised to establish fully-fledged diplomatic relations with Israel within three months if Israel agreed to India's participation in the peace process. During this three-month period, the Indian Government committed to addressing the political concerns surrounding the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel within the Indian National Congress. To improve diplomatic relations, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs proposed normalising diplomatic relations with Israel a few months after receiving an invitation to Madrid. However, despite the positive nature of the proposal, Israel declined the offer. Moshe Yegar, Deputy Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that Israel's response was utterly negative. Although the proposal did not achieve the desired outcome, it highlights the ongoing efforts made by both nations to engage in constructive dialogue (Yegar, 1999).

The Indian government has acknowledged the importance of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel and, as a result, has initiated diplomatic dialogue. Most of India's political leaders have realised that fostering a strong and normative relationship with Israel is crucial (Cohen, 2001). The volatile political situation in the Middle East, characterised by the protracted Arab-

Israeli conflict and the subsequent peace-building efforts, such as the Madrid Conference of 1991, offered India a unique opportunity to undertake a comprehensive reassessment and recalibration of its policies towards Israel. This critical juncture in international relations presented a favourable context for India to adopt a more nuanced and pragmatic approach grounded in contemporary political science and international relations theory. As such, India could leverage its strategic position in the region to develop a more robust and sustainable foreign policy that was aligned with its national interests and values (Kumaraswamy, 1996).

In January 1992, China and Israel decided to normalise their diplomatic ties. This action prompted India's leadership to take a closer look at their own diplomatic relationships with Israel. With the end of the Cold War, many countries were seeking to establish normalised relations with Israel, and India saw the potential for a valuable partnership to boost their diplomatic efforts and address their military needs, given the collapse of the USSR. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao took the lead in forging full diplomatic relations with Israel to promote a more realistic and pragmatic approach to Indian foreign policy. As a result, on January 29, 1992, India extended full diplomatic recognition to Israel, establishing embassies in each other's territories (Pant, 2005). Prior to 1992, the relationship between India and Israel was tense due to disagreements over the Palestine issue. However, following the end of the Cold War, the minority government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao adopted a pragmatic and realistic approach towards normalising the relationship. This marked a significant shift in Indian foreign policy from an era of aversion to a willingness to collaborate in various areas of mutual interest. In January 1992, India opened its embassy in Israel, which Israel reciprocated with a similar move in New Delhi. Yitzhak Rabin expressed his eagerness to cooperate with India in all spheres, including defence ties to combat fundamentalism and terrorism, without any reservations. The establishment of diplomatic ties resulted in high-level interactions, paving the way for diplomatic visits and indicating immense potential for collaboration (Dixit, 1996).

The evolution of the India-Israel relationship from a state of tension to one of collaboration can be analysed through the lens of neorealist approach in international politics. Adopting a pragmatic and realistic approach by the minority government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao can be seen as a shift from a traditional state-centric approach to a more liberal one, emphasizing mutual interests and cooperation. Furthermore, establishing diplomatic ties between India and Israel can be viewed as a manifestation of the logic of consequences, where

state actors are motivated by their interests and act rationally to achieve their goals. In this case, the desire to combat fundamentalism and terrorism through defence ties was a key factor in the decision to normalise the relationship. The potential for collaboration between India and Israel was also influenced by the concept of soft power, where a state's ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion plays a crucial role in international relations. The exchange of high-level visits and the establishment of embassies can be seen as a way to project the soft power of both countries, which may lead to further cooperation in the future.

Although India and Israel established full diplomatic relations in 1992, it took time for the two nations to develop a robust defence and strategic partnership. However, both countries did establish limited economic, cultural, military, and diplomatic ties, signifying a positive trend in their bilateral relations. Notwithstanding the early visits made by Israel's Air Force Commander in 1994 and India's Chief of Defence Research and Development Organisation, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, the progress of bilateral relations was hindered by political instability and a weak coalition government in India. The Bharatiya Janta Party's (BJP) rise to power in 1996 and again in 1998 marked a turning point in India-Israel relations (Sharma and Bing, 2015). India and Israel maintained strong bilateral relations during the BJP's tenure, with frequent visits from high-profile politicians and military leaders. In 1996, Israeli President Ezer Weizman led a delegation of 24 business leaders to India, strengthening their economic ties. The strategic partnership between the two countries has grown over the years, with Israel providing support to India in investment and technical assistance in the military domain (Swamy, 2006).

The visitation of India's Home Minister, L.K. Advani, flanked by emissaries from RAW, IB, and the Central Police Organisation, epitomizes India's assertive stance on internal security augmentation and intelligence-sharing accords with Israel's MOSSAD, predominantly targeting counterterrorism. The inception of a Joint Anti-Terrorism Commission followed the year 2000 visitation by Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh to Israel, underscoring the imperative of concerted actions against the burgeoning terrorism menace. Subsequent interchanges between Indian and Israeli officials have culminated in multiple bilateral compacts, accentuating the multifaceted partnership dynamics. Parliamentary delegations from both nations have furthered the bilateral rapport, indicating a mutual commitment to constructive engagement and cooperation. Consequently, the India-Israel symbiosis has become an indispensable facet of the contemporary international politico-security framework,

mirroring the escalating consensus on the necessity for collaborative endeavors in navigating complex global exigencies (Barzilai, 2001). The arrival of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003 marked a pivotal moment in the alliance between India and Israel. Despite facing pushback from various political factions and non-governmental entities, India persisted in deepening its military and strategic collaboration with Israel following Sharon's visit. This momentous occasion served as a global demonstration of India's readiness and competence to fortify its bond with Israel.

In contemporary times, the Indo-Israel relationship has witnessed a paradigm shift under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP-led NDA-II government's proactive approach towards foreign policy has significantly improved bilateral ties between the two nations. The strategic partnership has expanded beyond the traditional areas of cooperation, such as defence and security, to encompass several other domains, including science and technology, agriculture, tourism, and water management. Prime Minister Modi's astute leadership and forward-looking vision have helped establish a robust foundation for a more profound partnership with Israel. This has positioned Israel as a critical actor in India's diplomatic policy, surpassing other West Asian nations. The BJP government's efforts have notably strengthened the Indo-Israel relationship, with Prime Minister Modi being recognised for diversifying the partnership and elevating it to India's foreign policy (Madan, 2016). During his address, Prime Minister Modi acknowledged the Israeli concerns and underscored India's willingness to engage with Israel candidly and without any reservation. The year 2014 marked a departure from the norm when Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh visited Israel, which exclusively focused on Tel Aviv, forgoing a simultaneous visit to Palestine. This visit served as a significant milestone in the Indo-Israel relationship.

In 2015, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, in a precedent-setting address to the Israeli Knesset, extolled the burgeoning relationship between India and Israel. Subsequently, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin's sojourn to India accentuated the imperative of bilateral knowledge transference in agronomy and hydro-purification, epitomized by his visit to Haryana's Centre of Excellence. This liaison augurs well for enhanced Indo-Israeli collaboration, addressing exigencies in the contemporary geopolitical milieu (Jerusalem Post, 2016). In 2017, marking a quarter-century of diplomatic ties, India-Israel relations were significantly bolstered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Israel—the first by an Indian premier. Engaging in high-level dialogue, Modi and his counterpart, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, covered

key areas including counter-terrorism, defense collaboration, agritech, and innovation. This visit underscored the deepened strategic partnership between the two states. In Israel, PM Modi said, “India has suffered first-hand violence and hatred from terror; so, has Israel” (The Indian Express, 2017). In January 2018, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spearheaded a 130-member delegation to India for its foremost diplomatic and strategic summit. Advocating for fortified bilateral ties, this visit underscored the robust partnership between Israel and the BJP-driven NDA regime, spanning defense, security, tourism, and trade. The Modi administration has pivoted its policy towards Israel, recognizing it as a pivotal strategic ally while recalibrating its stance on Palestine. Israel epitomizes the archetype of strategic partnerships that the current Indian leadership aims to cultivate (The Hindu, 2018).

Over time, the bond between India and Israel has grown stronger, with increasing support from politicians across the political spectrum in India. Even parties such as the Janata Dal and the Communist parties, who were previously hesitant to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, have now recognised the benefits of a relationship between the two nations. With the establishment of diplomatic ties, both countries have made a concerted effort to overcome past differences and have successfully collaborated on numerous large-scale projects across multiple fields.

Areas of convergence

The bilateral relationship between India and Israel is multi-dimensional. There are several convergence areas for the evolving India-Israel cooperation. A range of issues exist between these two countries on which the interests converge significantly. Still, the critical areas of convergence are growing defence cooperation, counterterrorism collaboration, and technological and trade relations. Both nations are working very hard to deepen their relations in these areas and diversify them.

Defence Cooperation: The Bedrock of Relationships

The establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel paved the way for a mutually beneficial partnership in military cooperation, characterised by a convergence of interests in the realm of strategic security and defence policy. The early 1990s saw India undergo a significant transformation, resulting in restructuring its defense capabilities and a fundamental shift in its security outlook. This marked a crucial juncture in India's strategic

orientation as it sought to reposition itself in a rapidly evolving geopolitical context. Since the normalisation of bilateral ties in 1992, both nations have forged robust and dynamic military collaboration based on shared interests and convergence of strategic vision (Pant, 2005). Both Israel and India share similar perspectives on arms control and Islamic extremism. Nevertheless, the potential for military-strategic cooperation between the two nations lies in India's pursuit of technological self-sufficiency and Israel's objective of maintaining military supremacy over its Arab neighbors.

India has encountered significant obstacles in the modernization of its armed forces, leading to a long-term partnership with Israel. The Israeli security sector has found arms exports to be crucial in various facets of its operations. These exports assist in reducing production costs, offsetting research and development expenses, alleviating the national balance deficit, and creating employment opportunities. Since Israel's defence industries cannot rely entirely on the domestic market, they export roughly three-quarters of their production. India's military relationship with Israel presents a promising and invigorating opportunity that could be mutually beneficial for both countries. Israel's need to make its defence research a viable economic entity and India's requirement for advanced technology complement each other perfectly (Klieman, 1990).

India's defence forces have demonstrated an increasing predilection for Israeli-made military hardware since Pakistan's nuclear test in 1998 and the Kargil War with Pakistan in 1999. Consequently, Israel has emerged as India's second-largest defence supplier, trailing only Russia. Dinesh Kumar (2001) observed that India perceives Israel's research-driven industrial-military complex as a viable solution to specific defence and security requirements, highlighting the efficacy of Israeli military technology in the face of contemporary strategic challenges. Indian military officials have expressed keen interest not only in Israeli weapons and technology but also in the successful warfare strategies and concepts employed by the Israeli Defence Forces, which has bolstered India's strategic thought leadership. Moreover, Israel's relentless pursuit of qualitative superiority in arms over its regional rivals is intimately linked to its exploration of additional markets. India is a highly coveted prospect given its strategic location and military capabilities. Despite a change in government for both India and Israel in 2004, the level of military cooperation between the two nations remained unaffected, with the Indian Defence Minister under the UPA government, Pranab Mukherjee, unequivocally stating that there would be no modification to the existing defence ties between

India and Israel, thereby underscoring India's unwavering commitment to its strategic partnership with Israel. (Indian Express, 2004). The state of Israel is currently involved in the sale of military hardware to the Republic of India. It is also aiding in the modernization of India's antiquated Soviet-era weaponry. In 1993, the Foreign Defence and Export Department of the Israeli Defence Ministry appointed fifty local agents in New Delhi to promote a range of Israeli defence articles to the Government of India (Kumaraswamy, 1998). As per the Aviation Week and Space Technology Journal's June 7, 1993 report, India procured a state-of-the-art fire control system and thermal imager from Israel for their Vijayanta tanks, complemented by upgraded armour, artillery equipment, and ammunition. Moreover, India acquired 16 Hunter and Seeker unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Israel, as disclosed by Defence News in March 1994. Further, in April 1995, Flight International reported that India had acquired heavy missiles from Israel. Lastly, Strategic Digest noted that India had purchased Elta Electronics' radar jamming pads for its air force in the spring of 1996. These acquisitions signify India's efforts to modernise its military capabilities through strategic partnerships with advanced state and non-state actors in the global arena (Strategic Digest, 1996).

In December 1996, The Times of India reported that the Indian Air Force had acquired an advanced Air Combat Manoeuvring Instrumentation System (ACMI) from Israel to enhance their air combat tactics. Additionally, the Ramata division of IAI was given a contract to build two Devora patrol boats in Goa (Times of India, 1996). After the Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan in 1999, India looked to enhance its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. They procured electronic support measure sensors from Israel, a non-allied state, to bolster their situational awareness. Additionally, the Indian Army received military communication systems from Tadiran Communication Company, which improved their command-and-control infrastructure. In 2003, the Indian Defence Ministry signed an agreement to procure 100 tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and 200 UAVs for low- and high-altitude missions. This improved their operational mobility and situational awareness. The Indian MiG 27 combat aircraft was then fitted with advanced Israeli avionics systems, and a contract was signed to develop helicopter detachable systems, strengthening their vertical lift capability. Israel also provided India with various radar systems, such as portable battlefield radars, border monitoring equipment, human movement-detecting sensors, hand-held thermals, and night vision equipment, which enhanced their border surveillance and reconnaissance operations (Inbar, 2004). In 2005, the Indian government agreed with IAI to acquire 18 Heron unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), with an option for an additional 16. The Indian Navy also

ordered 20 Barak anti-missile systems from Israel, with the possibility of buying 10 more in the next few years. (The Times of India, 2005).

Based on Kumar's analysis, Israel and India have established a military partnership involving the exchange of technology, co-development of weapons, and joint military production. India has sought Israeli technology to support various military projects, including light combat aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, battle tanks, and missiles (Kumar, 2001). India and Israel forged a mutually beneficial partnership that bolstered India's military manufacturing capabilities while contributing to Israel's research and development of cutting-edge weaponry. India has set its sights on establishing a quick deployment force and a rapid mobility force for specialised missions, leveraging Israeli technology and expertise. One notable example of this fruitful collaboration is the joint venture between IAI and HAL, which upgraded the MiG 27 for both nations. In September 2002, the two companies inked a pact to co-manufacture Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) for the Indian Army. To provide maintenance and aviation services, they established a division in Hyderabad. In February 2003, IAI signed another contract with Nelco Company to develop, manufacture, and market electronic products specifically for the Indian Defence Forces. Israel's weapon development authority, Rafael, signed a contract in 2003 to transfer technology to produce the Spike anti-armour and the advanced Python-4 air-to-air missiles. Israel's Military Industries (IMI) also entered into a partnership with the state-owned company Ordnance Factory Board to manufacture a range of artillery, including 130 mm and 155 mm cargo projectiles, 122 cargo projectiles, 125 advanced tank ammunition, and 122 cargo mortars. Finally, in March 2004, Israel and India signed a landmark \$1.1 billion contract for Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to be delivered on a Russian Ilyushin aircraft platform, cementing their strategic partnership (Haaretz, 2004).

In March 2005, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and India's Aeronautic Development Establishment (ADE) entered into a contract to produce three variants of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) collaboratively. This agreement signifies a notable milestone in developing a mutual collaboration and strategic partnership in defence technology between the two nations (The Economic Times, 2005). In November 2008, officials from India visited Israel to discuss potential joint development projects for weapons. This visit indicated that there was a continued interest in technology development collaboration and the strengthening of diplomatic ties between the two nations (Dagoni, 2011). In 2014, the honourable Prime

Minister Modi successfully concluded a strategic weapons deal, thus strengthening India's defence capabilities. As a result of this deal, the Indian navy procured the cutting-edge Barak anti-ship system from Israel, which has significantly enhanced the country's maritime security posture. Moreover, the Indian government also approved the Air Force acquiring 10 Heron TP drones from Israel Aerospace Industries in 2015, bolstering India's aerial capabilities and furthering its commitment to maintaining regional stability (Miglani, 2015).

India and Israel enhanced their defence cooperation through procuring two Phalcon in 2016 and a military agreement worth \$2 billion that was signed in 2017 (Pandit, 2017). India has recently made a deal to acquire a minimum of ten Heron-TP drones from Israel to enhance its capacity to carry out cross-border military operations. The purchase is worth \$400 million and suggests that the drones may be deployed on India's western border. According to reports, India had previously signed a contract with IAI in 2019 for an additional 50 Heron UAVs worth approximately \$500 million (UAS Vision, 2019). During the Defence Expo 2020, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Dynamatic Technologies Limited (DTL) entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to promote the production, marketing, and sale of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by the three entities. This partnership is expected to capitalise on the diverse aerospace and defence capabilities of the parties involved. It will likely provide a considerable fillip to the indigenous manufacture of UAVs in India (Sethi, 2020). In November 2021, SSS Defence, a division of Stumpp, Schuele, and Somappa Springs Private Limited, was awarded a contract to upgrade AK-47 rifles for the Southwestern Command in Jaipur. They won the contract after competing with an Israeli company. SSS Defence is only the second private manufacturer of small arms to receive orders from the Ministry of Defence, with PLR Systems being the first. Notably, PLR Systems has a connection with Israel Weapons Industries (IWI) (The Hindustan Times, 2021).

India-Israel Agriculture and Water Management: Flowering Buds Cooperation

The agricultural sector has been a key area of cooperation between India and Israel since the establishment of diplomatic ties. Over the years, the two nations have initiated several collaborative agricultural projects that have focused on a wide range of domains, such as water management, fertilisers, greenhouses, pesticides, insecticides, tissue culture, horticulture, animal husbandry, dairy development, and the use of solar energy. Israel's agriculture, food security, and energy expertise have played a critical role in these joint ventures, enabling both countries to leverage their comparative advantages and achieve mutual benefits (Embassy of

India). The Israel Agency for International Development Cooperation, also referred to as MASHAV, is a significant contributor in the field of cooperation. Working in conjunction with the Centre for International Agriculture Development Cooperation (CINADCO), MASHAV is entrusted with the responsibility of executing Israel's agricultural programmes with India. The National Horticulture Mission at the Agriculture Ministry, also known as the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), serves as the nodal agency on the Indian side. In addition, MASHAV signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in February 2007 with the aim of sharing expertise and technology while bolstering the capabilities of national agricultural research institutions (Times of India, 2007).

In 1996, President Weizman visited India. The Indo-Israeli Research and Development Farm was showcased during the visit at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in Pusa, New Delhi. The farm displayed Israel's proficiency in high-tech agriculture and aimed to exhibit diverse crop cultivation using advanced irrigation technology and crop protection methods suitable for India's diverse agro-climatic zones. In an interview, Ephraim Doweik stated, "We have a unique experience of developments, which we believe is more relevant to the needs of developing countries like India because it is the result of a new experience of the last 50 years" (Frontline, June 4, 1993). Israel's agricultural industry has overcome challenges related to natural resource scarcity through productive methods developed from close collaboration between farmers, researchers, and industries. The Agro-Advantage Maharashtra Exhibition on November 6, 1998, significantly boosted trade between India and Israel in the agriculture industry. India and Israel signed a three-year work plan for agricultural cooperation on May 11, 2006. The plan aimed to promote collaboration and achieve breakthroughs. The work plan was signed by Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and his Israeli counterpart in Tel Aviv. Pawar led a high-level delegation to Agritech in 2006, accompanied by senior delegates from several Indian states (Press Information Bureau, 2006).

The India-Israel Agriculture Project (IIAP) was initiated in 2008 and has been renewed every three years since then, with the latest renewal being in 2021. The project has been implemented in 14 Indian states across four phases, with a total expenditure of approximately Rs. 254 crores. Haryana has received the most funding and has hosted projects in all four stages. The IIAP was extended until 2021 during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017 (Rajiv, 2023). The India-Israel Agriculture Project (IIAP) has established 30 Centres of Excellence (CoE) in

agriculture across 10 Indian states. The project aims to improve India's agricultural practices using Israeli expertise till 2023. It focuses on soil and water management, crop production, plant protection, farm mechanization, animal husbandry, dairying, and more. The CoEs focus on crops, fruits, vegetables, beekeeping, and genetic improvement of local herds. The project has produced 25 million high-quality vegetable seedlings and trained over 100,000 farmers in latest horticultural technology (Embassy of Israel in India, 2015).

India and Israel have collaborated to create 'Indo-Israel Villages of Excellence' with the aim of promoting the best farming practices. This project has been initiated with the establishment of 13 centres of excellence that will cover at least 75 villages across eight states in India (Press Information Bureau, 2021). Israel has made significant advancements in horticulture, aquaculture, floriculture, and arid-zone farming by utilising its limited water resources efficiently. India can benefit from these achievements, particularly in semi-arid areas such as Rajasthan. In 1997, an executive agreement was signed that outlined future action plans, including the establishment of tissue culture laboratories and modern agriculture facilities. Israeli companies are actively introducing innovative technologies in India, and Tahal, a highly respected Israeli water management company, is involved in pilot projects across Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu (Israel Today, 1997).

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) partnered with IDE Technologies Limited, an Israeli desalination company, to build a plant generating 200 million liters of water daily. This initiative resulted from an MoU signed between the parties. The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation also signed an MoU with Israel in 2016 to leverage their expertise in water resource management. During President Reuven Rivlin's visit, another MoU was signed to help India address its water scarcity issues by leveraging Israel's extensive experience in water management (Rajiv, 2023). Farmers in India are adopting Israeli drip irrigation technology to maintain crop yields while conserving water. This method has gained popularity since diplomatic ties were established between the two nations. According to reports, 32 Israeli-led water projects are underway in 13 Indian states. Ron Malka, the Israeli Envoy, has noted that these initiatives have significantly impacted improving water management and promoting sustainable agriculture practices (Malka, 2019). Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, India's Jal Shakti Minister, attended the World Water Technology and Environmental Control Conference and Exhibition in Israel last year. The main purpose of his visit was to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in critical areas such as water

reuse, rejuvenation, recycling, and wastewater treatment. The India-Israel Bundelkhand Water Project recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Uttar Pradesh government to address the region's water scarcity issues. The project will leverage Israeli expertise to improve agricultural practices and implement drip irrigation methods to increase water availability. According to reports, Netafim, an Israeli company, is actively using its drip irrigation systems to combat the region's ongoing drought. Jain Irrigation Systems, an Indian company, acquired Naan Dan, the Israeli pioneer of drip irrigation systems, back in 2007 and fully owned the company by 2012. However, in January 2020, reports emerged that Jain Irrigation Systems was facing significant debts due to their expansion projects and was exploring the possibility of selling Naan Dan wholly or partially to a buyer (Shai Shalev, 2020).

Cooperation in Tourism and Culture: Deepening Aspects of Cooperation

The establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Israel has led to a notable upswing in bilateral tourism. This trend can be attributed to both nations' distinctive historical and cultural characteristics. As per an Israeli ambassador to India, the richness of Israel's historical legacy makes it an alluring destination, with all corners of the country serving as a testament to its past. Popular tourist sites in Israel include Bethlehem, Nazareth, and the Sea of Galilee. Kibbutz, which is the only communist society in Israel, is another well-known destination. Additionally, the country has a number of small farming communities that follow Marx's ideology of collectivism, where the property is not privately owned, and the members work together based on their abilities and needs. These unique features of Israel's political and social landscape have contributed to the growth of tourism between India and Israel (Tourism India, 1999). At the beginning of 1992, after diplomatic relations were established between India and Israel, many visas were issued to Indian citizens to travel to Israel, estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000. This group of visa holders comprised a varied population, including pilgrims, businesspersons, tourists, and individuals visiting their families in the country (The Week, 1992). India's rich cultural heritage, traditions, and civilization have fascinated the Israeli population, leading to a significant number of Israeli visitors to India. Since the establishment of ambassadorial ties in 1993, around 50,000 Israelis have travelled to India to explore its cultural and historical wonders. The Israeli people have a profound admiration for the diverse offerings of India's heritage (The Economic Times, 1993).

A fresh chapter of cultural exchange between India and Israel has commenced with establishing an Israeli Cultural Centre in New Delhi. The centre provides a variety of offerings, such as

Hebrew classes, lectures, film screenings, cultural discussions, and an extension of the Department of East Asian Studies at Tel Aviv University to encompass a track in Indian and Sanskrit studies (Embassy of Israel, 2001). Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and Hebrew University in Jerusalem had planned to collaborate on cultural initiatives that would allow students and artists to actively engage with and explore the unique features of their respective cultures and traditions. This collaboration received significant enthusiasm from individuals in both countries. In September 2005, Kumari Selja, the Minister of State for Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, visited Israel and participated in the "International Conference for Women Leaders on Gender and Migration Issues under the Millennium Development Goals" (Embassy of India, 2005). Tel Aviv University and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a rotating chair in Indian studies. In July 2008, a delegation, which included the Vice-Chancellors of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia University, North East Hill University, and the University of Calcutta, visited Israel. Additionally, on July 24, 2008, the delegation performed at the Karmiel Dance Festival in Israel. The performance featured a Hindustani violin group directed by Ms. Anupriya Deostale and a Kuchipudi dance group directed by Ms. Vyjanthi Kashi, both supported by the ICCR (Ministry of External Affairs Report 2008–09).

According to reports, a considerable number of people travel between India and Israel every year. It is estimated that around 30,000 Israelis visit India annually, often staying for an extended period ranging from six months to a year. The Indian embassy in Tel Aviv has reportedly observed a consistent increase in the number of Indian visa applications, with 25,409 visas issued between January and October 2006 (Times of India, 2006). In May-June 2006, four individuals of Israeli-Indian origin participated in the "Know India Programme" organised by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Additionally, an official from the Israeli Foreign Office attended the 41st Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats, held by the Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi from October 4 to November 10, 2006. During the 2015 annual conference of the Federation of Indian Travel Agents in Israel, about 600 Indian tourist agents gathered to discuss ways of minimising travel barriers. Airlines such as Arkia, El Al, and Air India offer flights connecting various cities in India and Israel. In March 2018, Air India's flight AI139 made history by breaking a 70-year overflight ban on flights to Israel and becoming the first airline to fly non-stop between New Delhi and Tel Aviv over the airspace of Saudi Arabia (Haaretz, 2018). Air India has recently received a unique benefit, which indicates an improved relationship between Israel and the Arab world. The airline now operates a faster 7-hour flight

between India and Israel, which is shorter than ELAL's 9-hour flight. The streamlined visa application process and lower application fees by the Israeli government have increased the number of Indian tourists visiting Israel. In 2017, more than 60,000 Indians visited Israel, which is expected to exceed 100,000 this year (Times of India, 2017).

The relationship between India and Jews can be traced back to their shared experiences of persecution and refuge throughout history. Despite lacking formal diplomatic ties, the two communities have established a strong cultural bond through regular cultural initiatives and academic exchanges. In 1993, India and Israel signed a cultural agreement to facilitate cultural cooperation, including exchanging students and scholars in various fields such as Hebrew studies, Jewish culture, West Asian and international studies, and agriculture. This agreement is a significant milestone in developing their bilateral relations, which have recently evolved into a strategic partnership. As important players in the international community, both countries share a common interest in maintaining peace and stability in the region, and their cooperation in cultural and academic spheres serves as a foundation for their broader strategic partnership. The establishment of a chair in Hebrew studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University proposed and agreed upon during the visit of Israeli Minister for Education A.R. Ubinstein in January 1996, is a testament to the growing significance of their cultural ties and academic exchanges in shaping their strategic interests (Naaz, 1990).

India-Israel Economic Collaboration: The Bud of Relationships

The development of diplomatic relations between Israel and India has engendered a significant upswing in their economic ties. Recognising the exigencies of augmenting its economic growth, India has redirected its foreign policy towards this end. Consequently, India has fervently pursued foreign investment, joint ventures, and high technology expertise while simultaneously exploring new markets to expand its exports and foreign trade. The establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Israel in 1992 paved the way for Israel's participation in India's flourishing industries. Since then, both nations have inked several trade agreements and memoranda of understanding, including the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, double taxation avoidance, and bilateral investment protection. They have also collaborated on joint industrial projects, with India emerging as a lucrative market for Israel's agro-technological sector. Presently, India ranks as Israel's largest trading partner in Asia. Following the establishment of diplomatic ties, the Federation of Israel Chamber of Commerce

and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry formed a joint business council, which conducts regular joint economic committee meetings.

In September 2003, Prime Minister Sharon visited India and signed six agreements between the two countries. In October 2004, Israel's Finance Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, met with his Indian counterpart in Washington to discuss monetary guarantees for Indian states to carry out projects by Israeli companies. Ehud Olmert, Israel's Minister of Industry, Trade, and Employment, led representatives from 45 leading Israeli companies to India the following month. After Olmert's visit, the Director General of the Indian Trade Ministry travelled to Israel to discuss bilateral trade and lay the groundwork for a significant economic agreement. Finally, in November 2005, the Bank of India (BOI) opened its first branch in Israel (Maariv, 2005). The trade between Israel and India in 1992 was valued at US \$202 million, which increased significantly to US \$2.4 billion by 2005. This trade partnership surge between the two countries highlights their growing bilateral relations. Interestingly, both nations have expressed a desire to enhance their trade relations further and aim to achieve a trading partnership worth US \$5 billion (Kumar & Yaron, 2007). Trade fairs and exhibitions have become an effective way of raising awareness about business opportunities and building connections between Indian and Israeli companies. Global agro-exhibitions have been particularly successful in this regard. Israeli agricultural exhibitions have attracted significant interest from Indian delegations and high-ranking officials, including state ministers. As a result, cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture has seen significant growth.

India and Israel have established a robust bilateral trade relationship, with India serving as Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh-largest partner globally. This partnership is based on essential and mutually beneficial sectors, including defence, security, agriculture, and information technology (IT). It is noteworthy that bilateral merchandise trade between the two countries has witnessed significant growth over the years, surging from US\$200 million in 1992 to US\$7.86 billion during the 2021–2022 fiscal year, with India enjoying a trade surplus in this alliance (India Briefing, 2022). The trade relationship between India and Israel is quite strong, with India exporting a wide range of goods to Israel, including diamonds, precious stones, chemicals, textiles, refined petroleum, and more. In fact, diamonds alone make up almost 40% of the total trade between the two countries. On the other hand, India also imports numerous items from Israel, such as precious metals, chemicals, machinery, fertilisers, electronics, and defence equipment. Interestingly, the Israeli market is becoming increasingly

attractive to Indian IT companies like TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, and Wipro. Many Indian businesses have also acquired a significant stake in their Israeli counterparts, with Jain Irrigation purchasing Naan Dan, a leading irrigation equipment manufacturer in Israel, and Sun Pharma acquiring a controlling stake of 66.7% in Taro Pharmaceutical Industries, an Israeli pharmaceutical firm (Forbes, 2019).

The Indian government has released information stating that Israel has invested more than US\$270 million in India through foreign direct investment (FDI) between April 2000 and March 2022. Israel has focused on high-tech industries and agriculture, making over 300 investments in India, including establishing manufacturing plants, research and development (R&D) centres, subsidiaries, and more. In addition to traditional fields such as agriculture and chemicals, Israeli expertise is increasingly sought in new sectors like water technologies, homeland security, and real estate. Some notable Israeli companies that have invested in India include Netafim, IDE, Teva Pharmaceuticals, and ADAMA. India has also been expanding its economic footprint in Israel, most recently with Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ), a joint venture between India's Adani group and Israel's Gadot Chemicals Tankers and Terminals Ltd, winning the Haifa Port bid for US\$1.18 billion in July 2022 (Haaretz, 2022).

Conclusion

After thoroughly analysing the relationship between India and Israel, the study has produced comprehensive conclusions that pave the way for further research. Rather than adopting a rigid approach, the study has employed a flexible methodological framework to identify the factors that have led to the convergence of the two nations over time. In recent years, the bilateral ties between India and Israel have strengthened and diversified, encompassing various converging domains. The primary drivers of this alliance are defence ties and the shared threat of Islamic terrorism. Both nations' right-wing ruling parties have sought to reinforce and strengthen their bilateral partnership by using Islamic fundamentalism. The defence and strategic cooperation between these countries have immense potential for growth, and both nations are undertaking significant measures to expand their relationship, overcome limitations, and realise a fully-fledged alliance. Given the deepening relations between China and Pakistan, India must establish a robust partnership with Israel to counter the growing Sino-Pakistani alliance. The current global landscape strongly supports a robust Indo-Israeli alliance, given that both nations share a history of civilizational contacts and embrace democratic values. By collaborating more

closely, India and Israel can derive mutual benefits across various fields, including defence, technology, and intelligence. India has already forged deep ties with Israel, and it is natural for the two nations to continue to work together to advance their respective interests.

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