

## **India-Israel Partnership: From Covert Ties to Strategic Embrace**

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As Israel marks its 77<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, the growing partnership between New Delhi and Jerusalem stands as a testament to the two resilient democracies united by shared values and strategic priorities. Despite vast differences in size, social demography, and political geography, the two Asian countries have forged a strong relationship rooted in their common fight against terrorism - a struggle that has shaped their military doctrines, foreign policy outlooks, and global partnerships.

Both the countries have been frequent targets of cross-border terrorism. India has endured the trauma of the 2001 Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai siege, the 2016 Pathankot attack, and the Pulwama attack in 2019, and the most recent Pahalgam killings — all orchestrated by Pakistan-based terrorist networks. Israel, too, faces continual threats from various extremist groups, requiring constant vigilance and high deterrence. These parallel experiences have deepened mutual empathy and driven collaboration in counterterrorism, defense, and intelligence-sharing.

**From Covert ties to Open embrace:** It is often forgotten that Israel extended support to India even before formal diplomatic ties were established. During the [1962](#) Sino-Indian War, Israel, under PM David Ben-Gurion, covertly sent arms and ammunition to India (Kumaraswamy, 2020). Similarly, in the [1971](#) Indo-Pakistan War, Israel again supplied crucial military assistance via clandestine channels — all while India had yet to officially recognize Israel (Ganguly, 2000). These early gestures of solidarity reflected a quiet, covert but resolute convergence of strategic interests.

The real transformation of bilateral ties came after the Cold War, when India formally established diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992. In 1992, total bilateral trade stood at approximately US\$200 million, primarily revolving around diamonds and chemicals. By [1997](#), this figure had more than tripled to over US\$ 650 million, reflecting the strengthening economic engagement between the two countries (Naor, 1999). In [1998](#), during the second meeting of the India-Israel Joint Trade and Economic Committee, both sides set an ambitious target of reaching US\$1 billion in bilateral trade by the year 2000 (PIB, 1998). This target was achieved by [May 2000](#), with trade increasing fivefold since the initiation of formal ties. Initially dominated by a narrow range of commodities, the trade relationship diversified significantly over the years to include sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and high-tech equipment (PIB, 2000). This diversification was facilitated by a series of bilateral agreements in areas

including agriculture, science and technology etc. The economic trajectory during this period laid a robust foundation for the broader strategic partnership that has since evolved.

The Kargil conflict of 1999 further solidified the strategic trust between the two countries. When India urgently required precision-guided munitions to conduct high-altitude strikes against Pakistani infiltrators, Israel swiftly responded. It supplied laser-guided bombs and surveillance drones that were quickly integrated with India's [Mirage-2000 fleet](#), significantly improving target accuracy in the harsh terrain (India Today, 2017). Within a decade, India and Israel's friendship turned into a robust defense partnership.

However, the relationship truly deepened after 2014, when the Narendra Modi-led government prioritised strategic engagement with Israel. In [2017](#), PM Modi became the first Indian PM to visit Israel, marking a diplomatic breakthrough (TOI, 2017). He was welcomed with unprecedented warmth by PM Benjamin Netanyahu, symbolising a relationship that had moved from the shadows to centre stage. Between [2018 and 2022](#), Israel was India's second-largest arms supplier, accounting for nine percent of India's total arms imports, according to [SIPRI](#) (Reuters, 2024; SIPRI, 2025). India's procurements include Barak-8 surface-to-air missile systems, Heron and Searcher UAVs, aerostat radar systems, and Spike anti-tank missiles. Beyond procurement, the focus has shifted toward joint development. Israeli defense firm Elbit Systems operates a facility in [Hyderabad](#) through a joint venture with Adani Group, producing advanced drones for Indian forces (ELP, 2023). Cooperation also extends to cyber warfare, AI-based surveillance, border fencing technologies, and space-based monitoring systems — vital aspects of modern asymmetric warfare. The two nations also conduct regular joint military drills and intelligence exchanges. India's western borders in Punjab and Jammu now utilise Israeli border surveillance tech, including fibre-optic sensors and smart fences. Homeland security cooperation has been institutionalised through multiple working groups focusing on urban terrorism, intelligence coordination, and critical infrastructure protection.

Over the last two decades, the trade and commerce between the two countries has increased multi-fold. In 2000, bilateral trade was approximately US\$1 billion, primarily centred around diamonds and chemicals. By [2008](#), this figure had quadrupled to US\$4 billion, reflecting a robust expansion in economic ties (Anderson, 2009). The momentum continued, and by the financial year 2022-23, bilateral trade reached [US\\$10.7 billion](#), excluding defense transactions (Indian Express, 2023). In addition to trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) between the two nations also saw an uptick. Israeli investments in India amounted to [US\\$284.96 million](#) between April 2000 and March 2023, focusing on high-tech domains and agriculture (Moneycontrol, 2024). Conversely, Indian companies have also expanded their presence in Israel, with significant investments in sectors like renewable energy and water technologies.

The shared strategic vision is not confined to military and economic matters alone. The India-Israel relationship draws strength from a deeper civilisational connection. Jewish communities have lived in India for over two millennia without facing persecution — a rarity in Jewish diaspora history. The Bene Israelis of Maharashtra, Cochin Jews of Kerala, and Baghdadi Jews of Kolkata found in India a land of acceptance and opportunity. Today, over [85,000](#) Indian-origin Jews live in Israel, many of whom serve in the Israel Defense Forces and contribute in fields ranging from science to arts to diplomacy (Embassy of India, Tel Aviv, 2025). This community embodies a living socio-ethnic bridge between the two democracies.

**Support on international fora:** Over the last one decade, India has stood openly and firmly by Israel on the global stage and vice versa. It has resisted pressures from the Non-Aligned legacy and voted pragmatically in international forums, increasingly siding with Israel or abstaining on contentious issues. During the 2021 Gaza conflict, India's official stance called for de-escalation but also defended Israel's right to self-defence. Similarly, Israel has shown understanding of India's security concerns, especially regarding Pakistan-based terror outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The most recent Hamas attacks on Israel in October 2023—described as the deadliest assault on Israeli soil in decades—elicited a strong response from New Delhi. Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) [condemned](#) the Hamas attacks on Israel, stating that India stood in [solidarity](#) with Israel at this difficult hour (MEA, 2023; MEA, 2024; PMO, 2023). India's Ministry of External Affairs later reaffirmed Israel's [right](#) to self-defence, signalling a decisive shift from earlier hedged responses to conflicts in West Asia (Basalalli A & A Singh, 2023).

This support was not merely rhetorical. India resisted calls from various international quarters to equate Hamas' actions with retaliatory measures by Israel, maintaining that terrorism cannot be justified under any pretext. While India also urged restraint and humanitarian concern for civilian lives on both sides, its position highlighted a growing diplomatic maturity — balancing its energy ties with the Arab world while reaffirming solidarity with [Israel's fight](#) against terrorism (Economic Times, 2007). Likewise, Israel has been supportive of India's position on the [Kashmir](#) issue and has been critical of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on Indian soil (Parashar, 2017), also evident in Israel's unilateral support to New Delhi after Pahalgam killings and ensuing India-Pakistan tensions.

**Conclusion:** As Israel celebrates 77 years of independence, it does so with India as one of its closest partners in Asia. From being a quiet partner in the 1990s to now publicly endorsing Israel's concerns on the world stage, Delhi's equation with Tel Aviv has undergone notable shifts. From intelligence-sharing to cyber defense, from satellite tech to agriculture and water conservation, the bilateral engagement now spans across hard power and soft power. However, this partnership is not transactional, nor merely geopolitical — it is a partnership of democracies that have faced existential threats and emerged stronger. United in the fight against terrorism and bolstered by

shared values and strategic trust, India and Israel today represent a powerful axis for regional and global stability.

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