

“Diplomacy Beyond Boundaries: India–Israel Strategic Partnership In The Modi Decade (2014–2025)”

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the strategic transformation of India–Israel relations under Prime Minister Narendra Modi between 2014 and 2025. It traces the progression from pragmatic engagement to institutionalized partnership across defense, agriculture, technology, and diplomacy. Using qualitative analysis of official policy documents, government statements, and scholarly works, the study identifies the key drivers defense collaboration, innovation diplomacy, and ideological convergence while addressing constraints such as India’s West Asia balancing act, domestic sensitivities, and regional perceptions. The findings show that this decade marked a new foreign-policy assertiveness for India, reflected in visible proximity to Israel yet balanced by sustained ties with Arab and Islamic partners. The paper concludes that India’s Israel policy represents a broader trend of “multi-alignment,” blending realism with developmental diplomacy.

Keywords: *India–Israel relations, defense cooperation, Middle East policy, strategic partnership, innovation diplomacy, Modi foreign policy*

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I. Introduction

India and Israel two democracies separated by geography but linked by shared strategic concerns have forged an increasingly multidimensional relationship. Although formal diplomatic ties were established only in 1992, bilateral cooperation intensified after 2014, coinciding with the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Likud-led governments in Israel¹.

This period reflects a decisive departure from India’s earlier “quiet diplomacy” towards open acknowledgment of Israel as a key strategic partner².

Modi’s emphasis on counter-terrorism, defense modernization, agricultural innovation, and technology-led governance aligned neatly with Israel’s global outreach strategy³.

II. Literature Review

Early Engagement and Ideological Limitations

Until 1992, India’s solidarity with the Palestinian cause and dependence on Arab oil constrained relations with Israel. Yet, even before formal ties, covert military cooperation existed; Israel’s assistance during the 1999 Kargil War built early trust⁴.

The Modi Era and Policy Reorientation

Modi’s 2014 electoral victory signified both ideological and strategic shifts. His “developmental realism” prioritized tangible outcomes over Cold-War moralism⁵. Scholars of West Asian diplomacy note India’s new “multi-alignment” strategy, where cooperation with Israel coexists with partnerships with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran⁶.

Defense and Strategic Convergence

Defense forms the backbone of bilateral relations. India became one of Israel’s top three defense markets; joint projects such as the Barak-8 missile and Heron UAVs exemplify this trust⁷. Israel’s precision-warfare expertise complements India’s modernization goals⁸.

Agricultural and Technological Innovation

The Indo-Israeli Agriculture Project (IIAP) established 29 Centers of Excellence transferring drip-irrigation and greenhouse technologies⁹. Israel’s expertise in desalination and wastewater recycling informs India’s water-management initiatives in Rajasthan and Karnataka¹⁰.

Ideational Convergence and Domestic Critiques

Pate identifies ideological parallels in nationalism and security narratives between Modi’s India and Netanyahu’s Israel¹¹. Critics warn that importing Israeli internal-security models into Kashmir risks normalizing coercive governance¹².

Regional Balancing and Policy Constraints

India continues to endorse Palestinian statehood while deepening security and trade with Tel Aviv¹³. During the 2023 Israel–Hamas conflict, India condemned terrorism but urged restraint—an example of diplomatic hedging¹⁴. SETAV scholars caution that excessive tilt toward Israel could alienate Iran and OIC partners¹⁵.

III. Methodology

This qualitative study draws from official documents, MEA press briefings, academic publications, and media sources including The Jerusalem Post and News on Air. The period 2014–2025 was chosen to capture the “Modi decade.” Data were organized around five themes political diplomacy, defense, economic relations, regional balancing, and people-to-people ties¹⁶.

IV. Results And Analysis

Political and Diplomatic Engagement

Modi’s 2017 Israel visit the first by an Indian Prime Minister symbolized a historic shift. Netanyahu’s 2018 return visit reinforced high-level dialogue. The 2025 Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) secured investment and technology cooperation¹⁷.

Both nations also created joint commissions on innovation and digital security to sustain policy momentum¹⁸.

Defense and Security Cooperation

India procured UAVs, missile systems, and radars while expanding co-production under Make in India. A 2025 defense statement outlined plans for joint AI-drone development and logistics support¹⁹. Intelligence sharing and counter-terror training further cemented trust²⁰.

Economic and Technological Partnership

Bilateral trade grew from USD 5 billion in 2014 to over USD 10 billion in 2024²¹. Collaboration in AI, cybersecurity, pharma, and renewable energy is rising²². The India–Israel Innovation Fund (2021) supports joint start-ups in climate and agriculture technology²³.

Agriculture and Water Projects

IIAP Centers of Excellence trained more than 40,000 farmers, raising yields by 20 percent and reducing water use by 40 percent²⁴. Israeli methods of drip irrigation and desert farming have been adapted in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Karnataka²⁵.

Regional Balancing and External Constraints

India’s measured response during the 2023 Gaza conflict condemning terrorism while urging restraint illustrates strategic hedging²⁶. Simultaneously, New Delhi expanded economic engagement with the UAE and Saudi Arabia through the I2U2 group²⁷.

People-to-People and Cultural Relations

Over 12,000 Indian students studied in Israel by 2024, and 6,000 Indian construction workers migrated under a 2024 bilateral agreement²⁸.

Tourism, film festivals, and academic exchanges have enhanced mutual understanding²⁹.

Emerging Developments (2024–2025)

Key achievements include the 2025 BIT, Innovation Centers in Bengaluru and Tel Aviv, joint AI-defense projects, and Operation Sindhu India’s evacuation of 4,400 citizens from conflict zones with Israeli assistance³⁰.

V. Discussion

Interpretation and Trends

The relationship reflects a shift from limited defense dependence to strategic interdependence. Three factors explain this trend:

1. Ideational convergence of nationalism and security³¹.
2. Strategic hedging balancing Arab ties³², and
3. Economic synergy combining Israeli innovation with Indian scale³³.

Challenges

Regional backlash could strain relations with Iran and GCC states³⁴.

Domestically, critics argue that India's overt alignment erodes its non-aligned legacy³⁵. Over-dependence on Israeli weapons risks limiting defense autonomy³⁶.

Opportunities and Future Prospects

The BIT and prospective FTA can enhance investment and technology transfer³⁷. Cooperation in space, cyber security, and renewable energy offers new frontiers³⁸. Cultural and educational initiatives strengthen public understanding and normalize relations³⁹.

VI. Conclusion

From 2014 to 2025, India and Israel have transformed their relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership. What began as defense-oriented collaboration has expanded into fields of innovation, agriculture, water technology, and cyber security. Institutional frameworks such as the 2025 BIT and joint innovation centers showcase mutual trust and policy continuity⁴⁰.

Yet, India remains committed to balancing Israel ties with Arab engagement a policy rooted in pragmatism rather than ideology. As India's global profile rises, its relationship with Israel will continue to illustrate how a middle power can merge realist strategy with developmental diplomacy.

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