

# Are India and Israel Natural Allies or Strategic Partners?

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**Abstract**— Natural allies share common political and cultural values. Strategic partners may share none of these similarities, but a common goal or an agenda. Israel President said that Israel and India are natural allies, but when we go through meaning of these types of relationship, we find that there are some similarities between both nations, but we can't say that these similarities make them a natural ally. But Both nations have common goal to grow their economy and protect their people. So, we can say that India and Israel are strategic partner. We can see this in their relation. There is a close and substantial political, military, and economic tie between India and Israel. Despite India's official recognition of Israel in 1950, the two nations didn't establish full diplomatic relations until January 29th, 1992. The relationship remained unofficial during the period from India's recognition of Israel in 1950 to the beginning of the 1990s. Israel did not oppose India's 1998 nuclear test and took India's side in the Kargil war. Israel has not only given India state-of-the-art weapons but is also making weapons together as mentioned above. Israel is cooperating in India's internal security. Israel is strengthening India in the field of agriculture and irrigation by giving modern technology to India. India's trade with Israel is increasing continuously. Both countries are continuously increasing investment in each other's country. Even in international organizations, both the countries are seen cooperating with each other. A new organization I2A2 has been created in which both the countries are involved. People of both countries like each other. So, we can say that a strategic partnership has been formed between the two countries.

**Keywords:** India, Israel, Strategic Partner, Natural ally, Military, Political tie, Economic cooperation etc.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Israeli President Isaac Herzog has attended a cultural event at the Israel Museum on Thursday, December 1, 2022 to inaugurate the new exhibition titled 'Body of Faith: Sculpture from the National Museum of India, he said "India and Israel are logical allies because we share a fundamental commitment to the democratic ideals that gave rise to both of our countries. However, this evening goes beyond politics, business, and even diplomacy because the two nations also have a strong cultural resonance." This statement by the President has prompted us to ponder whether India and Japan are natural allies or only strategic partners? To know this we must first know the meaning of these words.

Natural allies share similar political and cultural values; they may support democracy or authoritarianism, capitalism, or communism; they may have similar historical and cultural backgrounds; they may have comparable societal structures; or they may hold similar religious beliefs. Natural ally countries neither had any reason to beat each other's asses nor they are going to change their agendas drastically in near future. They are just born to be friends. India and Bhutan are natural allies, sharing religious and cultural ties on the basis of Buddhism.

Strategic partners may share none of these similarities, but a common goal or an agenda. This term do have some significance in diplomatic scenario. Strategic alliance denotes various kinds of bilateral relationship with country; Economical, Technology sharing, Defence ties etc. This could be a security challenge, environmental issue, fight against terrorism or any issue of political interest. The countries may or may not be sharing fruitful relations, but they still come together to fulfill their common self interest. This is kind of symbiotic relationship, mutually beneficial for both partners. US, USSR, Britain had ideological differences during WW-II, but still they united against the Fascist Germany.

Israel is a Jewish state located in West Asia on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Here the system of parliamentary democracy with universal suffrage has been adopted. Israel has a population of about 9 million. Israel is considered the most advanced country in Western Asia and the Middle East in economic and industrial development. In 2023, the IMF estimated Israel's GDP at 564 billion dollars and Israel's GDP per capita at 58,270 (ranking 13rd worldwide), a figure comparable to other highly developed and rich countries.

There is a close and substantial political, military, and economic tie between India and Israel. Both of them belong to I2U2 Group. The governments of India and Israel have declared they are closely connected and share a desire to solve their challenges. Israel is India's top provider of military hardware, and Israel is India's second-largest supplier of hardware behind Russia. Information-sharing on terrorist organizations and collaborative military training are also part of the two countries' military and strategic ties.

## II. HISTORY OF RELATIONS

Israel was officially recognized by India on September 17, 1950. The Jewish Agency soon after opened an immigration office in Bombay. Later, this was changed into a Trade Office, and then a Consulate. When formal diplomatic ties were established in 1992, embassies were established. Since our bilateral relationship was upgraded in 1992, agriculture and defense have served as the two major foundations. A wide range of areas have seen rapid expansion in relations in recent years, and the cooperation's future is envisioned as a solid hi-tech collaboration appropriate for two knowledge economies.

The relationship remained unofficial during the period from India's recognition of Israel in 1950 to the beginning of the 1990s. Israel backed India in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. India was against having formal diplomatic ties with Israel for both internal and international reasons. Politicians in India were concerned about losing the Muslim vote if relations with Israel were normalized. Additionally, India did not want to jeopardize the enormous number of its citizens who were contributing to the preservation of its foreign exchange reserves by working in Arab countries along the Persian Gulf. Another factor for the absence of normalization of relations with Israel, in terms of preserving the flow of oil from Arab countries, was India's domestic energy needs. Formal relations between India and Israel were further hampered by India's foreign policy objectives and affiliations, particularly its backing for the pro-Palestine Liberation Organization. Non-Aligned Movement, India's Cold War inclination toward the Soviet Union, and India's need to balance Pakistan's influence with the Arab states, while Israel was a NATO and US ally. On an ideological level, the Indian National Congress, the country's then-dominant political party, opposed Israel because they believed it to be a state founded on religion, similar to Pakistan.

In its electoral campaign for the 1967 general elections, the right-wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh pledged to forge complete diplomatic ties with Israel. With 35 seats, the party nevertheless came in third place overall. For many years, there was no formal link between the two nations, but individuals like Moshe Dayan participated in meetings and cooperative efforts. India received critical information from Israel during its numerous battles.

India erected an embassy in Tel Aviv in January 1992, thereby establishing diplomatic ties with Israel after decades of non-alignment and pro-Arab policy. Since then, relations between the two countries have strengthened, largely as a result of shared strategic concerns and security threats. Israel provided India with weapons and ammunition during the Kargil War in 1999. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's desire for Muslim votes in India is thought by analysts to be the driving force behind India's repeated and vehement condemnations of Israeli military actions in Palestinian territories. Nevertheless, both countries have managed to maintain positive diplomatic relations.

India issued a rhetorical condemnation at the height of the hostilities between Israel and Hamas in July 2014, holding both parties accountable for the outbreak of violence and pleading with Israel to cease its "disproportionate use of force" in Gaza. This was interpreted by many as a break from India's custom of being more outspoken in its support for the Palestinian cause. Clarifying India's present stance on the matter, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stressed that "there is absolutely no change in India's policy towards Palestine, which is that we fully support the Palestinian cause while maintaining good relations with Israel." Since 2014, under Narendra Modi's leadership as prime minister, the relationship between India and Israel has been warm and friendly. He was the first Indian Prime Minister to ever travel to Israel in 2017. In 2017, India was Israel's biggest arms customer. Long-standing defense ties exist between the two nations. On June 6, 2019, at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), India supported Israel's motion to deny Palestinian non-governmental organization Shahed observer status.

President Isaac Herzog attended the 75th anniversary festivities of India's Independence Day at the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv in August 2022. He praised India's ascent to regional and global dominance in his speech and referred to Israel and India as "two modern republics proudly bound together by creativity and democracy, by ingenuity coupled with deep respect for timeless faiths and belief systems." When Herzog met with Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the minister of external affairs of India, he reaffirmed his commitment to fostering ties between Israel and India.

### **III. GROWING ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**

With the trade balance favoring India by US\$ 1.8 billion, bilateral trade expanded from US\$900 million in 2000 to US\$7.86 billion (excluding defense) in 2021. About 50% of bilateral trade is made up of diamond trade. Third-largest trade partner of Israel in Asia and seventh-largest overall is India.

Trade between the two countries has expanded recently to include a variety of industries, including medicines, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security. Precious metals and stones, chemical goods, textiles and textile products, among other things, are India's main exports to Israel. Precious stones and metals, chemicals, and mineral goods, as well as basic metals, machinery, and transportation equipment, are among India's main imports from Israel. India purchases a sizable portion of its potash needs from Israel, which is an important export for Israel to India.

Additionally, investments in the IT and start-up ecosystems have grown to be quite large. Israeli investments in Indian projects are expected to surpass US\$270 million by 2021. Israeli businesses have made investments in India in the areas of energy, renewable energy, communications, real estate, and water technologies. They are now concentrating on opening R&D facilities or manufacturing facilities there. Through mergers and acquisitions and the establishment of branch offices, Indian businesses

are establishing their footprint in Israel. Israeli irrigation equipment manufacturer Nandan was entirely bought by Jain Irrigation in 2012; TCS began operations there in 2005; State Bank of India opened a branch there in 2007; and Sun Pharma holds a 66.7% share in Israel's Taro Pharmaceutical Industries. Wipro, Tech Mahindra, and Infosys. Other significant Indian businesses that made big purchases or investments in Israel in the years 2015–2016 include Infrastructure Engineering. India and Israel are in discussions to reach a comprehensive free trade agreement that covers the exchange of services.

#### **IV. WATER AND AGRICULTURE COOPERATION**

Bilateral projects are carried out through MASHAV (Center for International Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and CINADCO (Centre for International Agricultural Development Cooperation of Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development) in accordance with a thorough Work Plan for agricultural cooperation that was signed on May 10, 2006, in Israel. Through the creation of 3-year Work plans, which include 3-year Action plans, the two parties' agricultural cooperation is formally established. In May 2020, the two parties agreed on the fifth phase of their joint action plan (2021-23). The program's objectives include expanding already-existing Centers of Excellence (CoE), creating new ones, extending the CoE's value chain, making the Centers of Excellence self-sufficient, and fostering partnerships with the private sector.

India has benefited from Israeli know-how and technology, particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra, in the areas of horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation, and post-harvest management. Israeli-developed drip irrigation equipment and technology are now widely used in India. Some Israeli businesses and specialists are providing their management and development expertise to dairy farming in India through their knowledge of high milk yield.

#### **V. MILITARY COLLABORATION**

Israel's annual weaponry exports to India account for nearly 40% of its total imports from other countries. According to Chaudhuri and Rein 2022, Israel has provided India with fully-formed arms and primary subsystems worth an estimated \$40 billion since 1992. Israel provides counter-insurgency training to India's anti-terror troops in addition to selling radar and surveillance equipment for military use. Israeli X-95 assault rifles were purchased by India's elite Cobra Commando force in November 2011 for use in counterinsurgency operations. The advanced Israeli Phalcon AWACS planes, which can identify inbound aerial threats such as hostile aircraft, cruise missiles, and other dangers well in advance of ground-based radars, were purchased by India in 2011.

Israeli exchanges of vital technologies for DRDO-designed and -produced missiles, electronic warfare systems, radar systems, navigation systems, and weapon control systems are an example of their defense collaboration. India recently made a drive toward self-reliance, and as a result, joint defense enterprises have been founded. A start in the right direction is the recently agreed India-Israel Vision on Defense Cooperation. Modern weapons systems like Skystriker drones, Travor Assault Rifles, and Barak 8 surface-to-air missiles are some of the results of the two nations' joint research and development efforts.

Cybersecurity is a promising area of collaboration that has emerged within the security realm. PM Modi praised the possibility of such a relationship during his visit in 2017. Since then, several Israeli unicorns have established operations in India, including Wiz, Orca Security, and Coralogix. India's CERT-In and Israel's National Cyber Directorate (INCD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2020 to exchange information on cyberthreats and develop a framework to support capacity-building activities. In order to advance this, the Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Pune organized a Cybersecurity Bootcamp in March 2022 in collaboration with the Israeli cyber education company ThriveDX in order to raise cybersecurity awareness among college students and working people.

#### **VI. De-HYPHENATION POLICY AT WORK**

Once India deliberately began to separate the Israeli-Palestinian issue from its interactions with the two parties, it was evident that India's partnership with Israel was flourishing. The present administration has worked hard to ensure that neither relationship has a veto over the other while making both relationships direct and public and less related to one another. An illustration of this occurred when PM Modi decided to make a solo trip to Israel in 2018 rather than combining it with a trip to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah in 2017.

India has also kept up its steadfast support for a Palestinian State. It has even frequently voted in opposition to Israel. India supported a UNHRC resolution in 2014 to investigate Israel's assault on Gaza, and it voted against Israel in a 2015 resolution denouncing human rights abuses in Palestine. After that, in 2021, it supported two further resolutions: one on the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and one on Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem.

#### **VII. POLITICAL TIE**

The two nations have cordial political connections. The partnership was elevated to a strategic level during Prime Minister Modi's historic first visit by an Indian PM to Israel, which took place from July 4–6, 2017, and seven Agreements/MoUs were inked in the areas of R&D innovation, water, agriculture, and space. During his visit to India from January 14 to January 19, 2018, Israeli Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu signed five semi-government agreements in addition to four G2G agreements on cyber security, oil and gas cooperation, film co-production, and air transport. Prior to these trips, the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin both visited Israel on official business in October 2015 and November 2016, respectively. Cooperation in various functional sectors, such as trade, agriculture, S&T culture, and security, has increased as a result of increased high-level exchanges and ministerial visits on both sides.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis of Indo-Israel economic, military, technical, security and political relations, we can see that the relations between the two countries have been continuously deepened since the late 1990s. Especially military and security relations have become have intense. The economies of both seem complementary to each other. Israel has proved very helpful in solving India's agriculture and water problems. Israel is continuously cooperating with India in internal security. But the definition of natural friend mentioned above does not fit the relation of these two, As the President of Israel claimed at a cultural event in December 2022 because the relationship between two countries is still in the stage of development. Even now, because of the relationship with Israel, there is always a dispute in India. India is constantly improving its relations with Palestine and Arab countries. India's dependence is still very much on Arab countries. For this reason, India can never ignore these countries. On the other hand, Israel's conflict with Arab countries continues. Second, the social and cultural ties between India and Israel are not very deep. Third, there is still no agreement on a free trade agreement between the two countries. Fourth, cooperation in political and strategic relations remains to be done in many areas.

But if we look at the basis of strategic partnership, we can see that India and Israel's relations are like the ones in the past 30 years. The reason for this is that military cooperation between the two has increased very rapidly in the last three decades. Israel did not oppose India's 1998 nuclear test and took India's side in the Kargil war. Israel has not only given India state-of-the-art weapons but is also making weapons together as mentioned above. Israel is cooperating in India's internal security. Israel is strengthening India in the field of agriculture and irrigation by giving modern technology to India. India's trade with Israel is increasing continuously. Both countries are continuously increasing investment in each other's country. Even in international organizations, both the countries are seen cooperating with each other. A new organization I2A2 has been created in which both the countries are involved. People of both countries like each other. So we can say that a strategic partnership has been formed between the two countries. we find that there are some similarities between both nation, but we can't say that these similarities make them a natural allies. But Both nation have common goal to grow their economy and protect their people. So we can say that India and Israel are strategic partner.

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