



# RECENT SHIFTS IN INDO-ISRAELI DEFENSE RELATIONS

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**Abstract :** Since the emergence of both India and Israel as independent nations, which happened around the same time i.e., 1947 and 1948 respectively, Israel has always been an exception in India's foreign policy [1]. In 1950, India recognized Israel as a sovereign independent state, although it was hesitant to establish full diplomatic relations [2]. Embassies were opened in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established. Defense and agriculture have been the two fundamental cornerstones of the bilateral engagement ever since Indo-Israeli relations were upgraded in 1992. This project gives an overview of the significant shifts in Indo-Israeli defense relations over the years.

**IndexTerms - Indo-Israel, defense relations, arms trade, defense cooperation, bilateral relations.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study's general questions focus on India's shifting perceptions and policies toward Israel in various international political contexts. In addition, the study aims to figure out why India changed its stance on Israel. What does defence cooperation between India and Israel look like in the future? What strategic implications does Indo-Israeli defence cooperation have? What are and were the stats of defence import and export between these two nations?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The case study approach was used to conduct the intended research. However, a few different methods have been used to meet the requirements. Due to the nature of the research, historical and analytical methods have been explored.

## III. DEFENSE TIES BETWEEN INDIA AND ISRAEL (POST-INDEPENDENCE: 1948-1993)

In 1948, Israel declared independence, but India refused to recognise it as a sovereign state. Only two years after gaining independence did India identify itself as a nation. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were adamantly opposed to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state in the region. Although India acknowledged the Jewish state in September 1950, full diplomatic relations were not established until 1992. The Indian National Congress adopted a pro-Arab stance in the Arab-Israel conflict as a result of Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to foster Hindu-Muslim unity and Jawaharlal Nehru's unfavourable assessment of the Zionist cause. In addition, India's support for and sympathies with the Palestinian cause influenced the country's decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel [3]. During the Cold War, Israel and India were on opposite ends of the political spectrum due to their anti-imperialist viewpoints. Indian officials played a role against Israel and rejected the partition of Palestine due to their anti-western and anti-Israel views [4]. During this time, India's political concerns were anti-colonial Afro-Asian solidarity, assistance for friends in the Kashmir conflict, neutralising Pakistan's influence on Arab countries, oil dependency on the Gulf of Basra, and exporting a large labour force to the Gulf [5]. During the Cold War, the relationship between India and Israel was at a historic low because Israel was a US ally while India's tendency was more towards Russia [6]. India developed close diplomatic, economic, and military ties with the Soviet Union, and therefore military power is edited by strength. Following the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India was obliged to realign its foreign policies to fit the changing international landscape [7]. It awarded full diplomatic recognition to Israel in 1992, prompting the two governments to open embassies in each other's countries. Since then, the Indo-Israeli connection has taken on new dimensions and is on the rise. Following the restoration of relations in 1992, the two countries were able to explore a variety of sectors of cooperation, including agriculture, culture, tourism, trade, and military exchanges. Although both governments are still hesitant to discuss cooperation in this sensitive area openly, arms sales are an important part of this growing collaboration. Existing research highlights the clear link between the convergence of Indo-Israeli interests in 1991-1992 and the almost instantaneous shift in global politics from a bipolar to a unipolar world, marked by the disappearance of India's traditional Soviet partner and the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower following the Gulf Crisis of 1990-91. The significantly altered structure of world politics in 1991 compelled India to alter its foreign policy toward the United States and the Western bloc, particularly Israel. After 1991, India's foreign policy was impacted by a variety of internal concerns. The Indian government was compelled to change its West Asia policy due to the existence of complementary national security objectives with Israel. Finally, individual leadership in India was critical in the rapid

development of a strong and durable strategic cooperation with Israel. It's crucial to examine the Narashima Rao government's vital role in transforming Indo-Israeli strategic cooperation from rhetoric to substance in the post-Cold War era [8]. In 1993, the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to India marked a watershed moment in Indo-Israeli ties. A series of agreements were established between the two countries in the fields of intelligence, security, and military equipment.

#### IV. DEFENSIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND ISRAEL IN THE 1990S

The decision taken by Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao in January 1992 to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel was driven by the potential for security cooperation[9]. Similar goals and rationales behind arms modernization, buildup and export brought the two nations closer. Moreover, Israel could potentially assist India in remedying problems with its program for developing indigenous weapons systems. Israel's Air Force Commander visited India in March 1994.

Two years later, his Indian counterpart, A.P.J Abdul Kalam, then-Chief of the Indian Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), paid a visit to Israel. High-level official visits, beginning with Israeli President Ezer Weizman's visit to India in December 1996, accompanied by a 24-member business group, demonstrated the warmth of the newly formed connections[10]. Following that, Israel offered India both financial and technical assistance in the areas of military aircraft, reverse engineering, and weapon system upgrades[11]. India also began purchasing a huge quantity of small guns and weaponry systems from Israel, including airborne early warning systems. In 1997, New Delhi dispatched its first military attaché to Israel, signalling a rising military component in bilateral relations.

India received advanced Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation from Israel in 1996, and it was installed at the Jamnagar air base. In the same year, the Indian Navy received two Dvora MK-2 patrol boats for \$10 million. In the field of electronics and communication, Israeli companies such as Tadiran have played an essential role in supplying India with necessary technology. Another Israeli military company, Soltam, has committed to provide the Indian Army with 155 mm self-propelled guns. Elta, an Israeli company, also secured a multimillion-dollar deal to improve the avionics aboard India's MiG-21 fighters in the 1990s[12]. The late-1990s negotiations for the acquisition of Israel's Barak-1 vertically launched surface-to-air missiles were a major technological and financial milestone in defence cooperation, providing India with cutting-edge technologies and eventually leading to co-production.

However, the BJP's success in creating a government coalition in 1998 provided the ultimate impetus for further Indo-Israeli military collaboration. While the Indian defence establishment had taken notice of Israel's weapon production capabilities and combat accomplishments, it was not until the BJP came to power that the benefits of bilateral collaboration began to overcome the objections of India's sizeable, but increasingly irrelevant, Muslim minority.

Despite its support for Palestinians in numerous international organisations, including the United Nations, New Delhi steadily moved to build ties with Israel. The growing threat of Islamist terrorism in the divided state of Jammu & Kashmir, as well as elsewhere in the country, has only deepened this bond. Meanwhile, Pakistan's growing nuclear arsenal and alleged backing of militant groups have provided India with more reasons to cooperate with Israel.

During the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan, Israel's willingness to send armaments, including munitions, laser guided bombs, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), reinforced growing defence ties[13]. The prompt answer to India's request for military assistance enhanced Israel's credibility as a reliable arms provider, even in the midst of a crisis, and bolstered the alliance[14]. Following the 1998 Pokhran nuclear test, Israel increased its arms shipments to India, while most major countries curtailed their technological exports to India. The visit of Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani to Israel shortly after, in 2000, further cemented the bilateral relationship.

New Delhi praised Israel's ability to upgrade obsolete Soviet military systems, which made up the majority of India's defence stockpile. Many of Israel's immigrants had previously worked as engineers and technicians in the Soviet military industry, giving them an advantage. India, predictably, resorted to Israeli businesses to upgrade these obsolete Soviet weapons. Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), for example, has signed substantial contracts with the Indian Air Force (IAF), including the upgrade of Russian-made MiG-21 aircraft. In addition, Israel outfitted the Indian Army's Russian-made T-72 tank fleet with cutting-edge fire control systems and thermal vision[15].

Another key aspect of Indo-Israeli defence cooperation is counter-terrorism measures. The security agencies' association precedes the formation of official diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the early stages of normalisation, however, cooperation between the two countries in this area was limited. Furthermore, this was never a military alliance because both countries prioritised their own national interests and made no promise to fight for each other[16].

This is still true today.

#### V. ARMS TRADE

The weapons trade in defence cooperation between Israel and India is still significant and growing. The entire amount of weaponry trade between the two nations in the previous decade is believed to be around ten billion dollars. Israel consolidated its position as one of India's largest arms exporters with the launch in May 2009 of the Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), which was equipped with Russian-made Ilyushin IL 76s and delivered in March 2010, and with annual arms trades totaling approximately \$1.5 billion, Israel became the second largest arms supplier to India after Russia by the end of 2006.

In March 2010, the two nations agreed to a massive contract worth around 1.4 billion dollars for the development and acquisition of Barak 8 medium-range air-to-air missiles. India expressed special interest in Israel's advanced missile defence systems, David's Sling and Iron Dome, in the mid-2010s. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approving the acquisition of 15 Israel Heron unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is another crucial step toward improving Indian-Israeli relations. In August 2017, the first long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) developed by the two nations was handed over to India's National Navy in a ceremony[17].

#### VI. MOMENTUM UNDER MODI

##### 6.1 Modi's first visit to Israel

The BJP, led by Narendra Modi, was re-elected in 2014 and again in 2019. It was a period when the Arab Uprising shook the Arab world's entrenched authoritarian regime and heightened regional competition between Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Israel

had exercised its muscles in the Gaza Strip, which is governed by Hamas, and challenged Iran's expanding influence in Syria[18]. The Modi administration took advantage of the situation to resolve a number of concerns in India's Israel policy. India and Israel celebrated 25 years of diplomatic ties in 2017. PM Modi went to Israel to make this event even more special. PM Modi and his Israeli colleague Netanyahu issued a joint statement in which they acknowledged that terrorism is a danger to world peace and stability and reaffirmed their strong commitment to combating it in all of its forms and manifestations[19].

## 6.2 Defence sector shifts:

Israel has become a partner in the Modi government's "Make in India" programme in the defence industry. Rafael, Israel Weapon Industries, and Elbit Advanced Systems have formed joint ventures with Kalyani Strategic Systems Ltd, Astra Microwave Products, Adani Group's Aero Defence Systems & Technologies, Alpha Design Technologies, Punj Lloyd, and Reliance Defence Ltd to manufacture Barak-8 MRSAM missile kits, drones, radio communication systems, and small arms over the years. India's Light Combat Aircraft Tejas programme also has Israel as a partner. On October 26, 2018, HAL inked two contracts with Elta Systems for the delivery of 83 ELM-2052 active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars and ELL-8222WB electronic warfare (EW) systems for its upgraded Tejas Mark-IA. Elta was chosen over Thales and Saab, two European defence companies[18]. The Tejas Mark-IA will also be equipped with Rafael's Litenig pods and the Derby missile defence system. All of these events suggest that bilateral defence cooperation between India and Israel is deepening and becoming more strategic in the post-Cold War era[18].

## VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

India's military requirements are projected to increase. The military's ability to upgrade and modernise is severely limited. Despite India's decision to be self-sufficient in fundamental technologies such as missiles, tanks, and aircraft, there remains a significant requirement for inputs, component imports, and collaboration. The major challenges in producing indigenously developed weapons are, first, that they rely heavily on foreign technical assistance, and, second, that they have a long research and development gestation period, which has resulted in the production of weapons that were already obsolete by the time series production began. The aim of progressively transitioning from importation of guns through licenced manufacture to local development and production of arms has yet to materialise.

Israel is a source of high technology for India in a variety of fields, including military-related businesses, and it is becoming increasingly important following the post-Pokhran restrictions. Building connections with Israel might be a powerful counterweight to Pakistan's military and political strategies. India in turn, is a significant and lucrative market for Israel. Collaborative research, joint manufacturing, and technology transfer are more likely to be part of any meaningful connection between India and Israel[20].

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