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### **India and Israel Look to Expand Cooperation**

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**A** quarter of a century after the normalization of relations between India and Israel, the strength of Indo-Israeli ties can be measured by the continuing attention and coverage the subject receives in the media and in academic circles. While the scope of bilateral trade is not significant (hovering around \$6 billion annually), there is immense potential for a strategic military partnership between the two nations.

India officially recognized the Jewish state on September 17, 1950 – incidentally, the day current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was born – but diplomatic relations between the two countries stalled until January 1992. India’s traditional support for many Arab states and its significant domestic Muslim population are often cited as the main reasons for this delay, even though a small Jewish community has lived in India for more than two millennia without any trace of anti-Semitism.

Yet even during the prolonged years of non-relations, limited military and security cooperation between India and Israel existed. For example, India received small quantities of arms and ammunition from Israel during its wars with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965 and 1971). In the late 1960s, India consulted with Israel when it set up its external intelligence agency and in later years when it revamped its protection protocols in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in October 1984. However, real progress in security relations had to wait until 1992 when the Congress government headed by Narasimha Rao normalized India’s relations with Israel.

The pace of India-Israel relations accelerated when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) first came to power between 1998 and 2004. Since the BJP returned to power in 2014, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, bilateral relations have expanded in scope. Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu became the first world leader to call and congratulate Modi in May 2014 upon his landslide electoral victory, and since then both have been communicating and exchanging greetings on a regular basis.

Political contacts between the two countries have expanded since 2014. To date, there have been two presidential visits between the countries. Indian President Pranab Mukherjee travelled to Israel in October 2015 and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin reciprocated in November 2016 with a visit to New Delhi. India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh, responsible for homeland security, visited Israel in November 2015, and that same month, Israeli defence minister Moshe Ya'alon visited India. There is increasing speculation that the crowning moment of the silver jubilee of normalization will be Modi's visit to Israel this summer.

In addition to warming political ties, the two countries have also expanded military cooperation since formal relations were established. Gradually, India began importing Israeli items such as fast patrol boats, UAVs, missiles, ammunition, and night-vision equipment. The highlight of this trend was India's purchase of three Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System, mounted on a Russian IL-76 platform, with the first arriving in 2004 and the contracts for two more signed last November.

Estimates suggest that between 2002 and 2007, India bought \$5 billion worth of defence equipment from Israel. Israeli companies have been regularly taking part in the biennial Aero India show in Bangalore, in southern India. There is a consensus among Indian analysts that Israel has emerged as a principal arms supplier to India and that India has become Israel's largest defence market. This phase coincided with the Jewish state losing the lucrative Chinese market after the end of the Cold War.

More recently, both countries have further expanded their areas of cooperation. In January 2008, India launched an Israeli satellite believed to be aimed at surveilling the Iranian nuclear program. Moving beyond the cash-and-carry model, the two countries are venturing into joint research and development programs. For example, last February, the Indian government approved a deal to jointly develop a medium-range surface-to-air missile system for the army worth over \$2.5 billion.

Overall, one can notice a distinct pattern in the trajectory of Indo-Israeli relations, and with on-going defence modernization running abound, military cooperation between the two nations is bound to expand.

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Web Link: <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/exclusive/middle-east/india-and-israel-look->

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