

India–Israel Relations in Transition: From Diplomatic Distance to Strategic Partnership

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ABSTRACT

India and Israel today share a strong strategic partnership in areas such as defence cooperation, technological innovation, agriculture, and counter-terrorism. However, the relationship between the two countries did not develop immediately after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. For several decades, India maintained a cautious diplomatic distance from Israel due to domestic political considerations, its support for the Palestinian cause, and its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement. Despite this diplomatic distance, limited cooperation continued in areas such as security and intelligence. The end of the Cold War and India's economic reforms in the early 1990s created new geopolitical conditions that led to the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992. Since then, India–Israel relations have expanded into a multidimensional partnership involving defence collaboration, economic cooperation, agricultural innovation, and technological exchange. This article examines the transformation of India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership. Using qualitative historical analysis and international relations perspectives, the study analyses the political, economic, and security factors that shaped this transformation. The article argues that changes in global politics, regional security concerns, and mutual technological interests played a major role in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

KEYWORDS: *India–Israel relations; strategic partnership; foreign policy; defence cooperation; Middle East politics; international relations.*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of relationship between India and Israel represents one of the most significant transformations in contemporary international relations, evolving from cautious diplomatic engagement to a multidimensional strategic partnership (Blarel, 2015; Kumaraswamy, 2018). Today, the two countries cooperate closely in areas such as defence technology, cybersecurity, agriculture, water management, and innovation. However, this partnership developed gradually and reflects major changes in India's foreign policy as well as shifts in global geopolitics. India officially recognised the State of Israel in 1950, but for more than four decades the relationship remained limited due to domestic political considerations and India's diplomatic priorities in West Asia (Kumaraswamy, 2010; Pant & Kumaraswamy, 2010). India maintained diplomatic

distance from Israel while simultaneously supporting the Palestinian cause and maintaining strong relations with Arab countries. This approach was shaped by several factors, including India's domestic political environment, its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement, and its dependence on oil imports from West Asian countries (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

During the Cold War period, India's foreign policy emphasized solidarity with newly independent states in Asia and Africa. Many of these countries supported Palestinian self-determination, and India adopted a similar position in international forums such as the United Nations. As a result, India avoided establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel despite recognising the Israeli state. Nevertheless, diplomatic distance did not mean

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complete absence of interaction. Historical evidence suggests that Israel provided assistance to India during critical moments, including the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. These instances demonstrated that security cooperation existed even before formal diplomatic relations were established (Pant, 2016).

The global political environment changed significantly after the end of the Cold War, encouraging many states to reassess their diplomatic priorities and strategic partnerships (Acharya, 2014; Miller, 2013). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new international order encouraged many countries to reassess their foreign policy priorities. At the same time, India initiated economic reforms that emphasised globalisation, trade, and technological cooperation. Within this new context, India decided to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. Since the normalisation of relations, cooperation between India and Israel has expanded rapidly. Defence collaboration has become one of the most important pillars of the relationship, with Israel emerging as a major supplier of defence technology to India. At the same time, cooperation has expanded into areas such as agricultural innovation, water management, space research, and cybersecurity.

High-level political engagement has also strengthened the relationship. Visits by political leaders, including the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel in 2017, marked an important milestone in bilateral relations. These developments indicate that India–Israel relations have evolved from cautious diplomatic engagement to a comprehensive strategic partnership. This article examines the transformation of India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership. It explores the political, economic, and security factors that influenced India's early foreign policy toward Israel and analyses the major developments that led to the expansion of bilateral cooperation in recent decades.

Literature Review:

Scholarly research on India–Israel relations has expanded considerably over the last three decades, particularly in the fields of international relations, foreign policy, strategic studies, and West Asian politics. Early studies by scholars such as P. R. Kumaraswamy, Harsh V. Pant, Ganguly, and Acharya focus mainly on India's diplomatic distance from Israel during the Cold War. These studies argue that although India recognised Israel in 1950, it avoided full diplomatic relations until 1992 because of its support for the Palestinian cause, domestic

political concerns, dependence on Arab oil, and commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement. India viewed the Palestinian issue within a wider anti-colonial framework and sought to maintain strong relations with Arab countries. However, scholars such as Pant, Barak and Sheffer, and Shlaim also show that India and Israel maintained limited security and intelligence cooperation even during this period, particularly during the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Thus, the literature suggests that India–Israel relations during the Cold War were more complex than official diplomatic policy indicated.

A second major strand of literature examines the post-Cold War transformation of India–Israel relations. Scholars such as Blarel, Pant, Miller, and Kumaraswamy argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union, India's economic liberalisation after 1991, and changing political conditions in West Asia encouraged India to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. Existing studies identify defence cooperation as the central pillar of the relationship after 1992. Scholars such as Barak and Sheffer, Levy, and Maoz highlight cooperation in missile defence, surveillance systems, drones, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism. Other studies by Kumaraswamy, McLaughlin, and Gordon show that the relationship has expanded beyond defence into agriculture, water management, innovation, cybersecurity, and start-up cooperation. Israel's expertise in drip irrigation, desert farming, water conservation, and technology has become particularly important for India. More recent literature by Malone, Menon, Karnad, and Roy-Chaudhury interprets the India–Israel partnership as part of India's broader strategy of strategic pragmatism and multi-alignment in an increasingly multipolar world.

Recent scholarship after 2020 has further widened the study of India–Israel relations by linking the partnership to broader geopolitical developments in West Asia. One important development is the Abraham Accords of 2020, through which Israel normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Scholars such as Miller and Fawcett argue that these agreements reduced the traditional divide between Israel and the Arab world and created greater diplomatic space for India to strengthen relations with both Israel and Gulf countries. Other recent studies focus on the I2U2 grouping involving India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Pant and Chaulia describe I2U2 as a new form of mini-lateral diplomacy based on cooperation in food security,

renewable energy, technology, infrastructure, and maritime connectivity. Likewise, recent scholarship on the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), announced during the 2023 G20 Summit, argues that the corridor significantly increases Israel’s importance in India’s connectivity and Indo-Pacific strategies. Studies by Jaishankar, Singh, Mohan, and Baru also analyse India’s West Asia policy after the Gaza conflict of October 2023. These studies suggest that India has attempted to balance support for Israel’s security concerns with continued support for Palestine, humanitarian assistance, and a two-state solution, reflecting a policy of “de-hyphenation” in which India treats its relations with Israel and Palestine separately.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, several important research gaps remain. First, most studies examine either India’s early diplomatic distance from Israel or the post-1992 strategic partnership, but few analyse the entire transformation of the relationship from 1948 to the present within a single framework. Second, much of the literature treats defence, economic, technological, and diplomatic cooperation separately, even though these dimensions are closely connected. Third, many studies continue to focus mainly on defence cooperation and therefore give insufficient attention to newer issues such as I2U2, IMEC, the Abraham Accords, innovation partnerships, and regional connectivity. Fourth, there is limited scholarship on how recent developments after 2020 have collectively reshaped India’s West Asia policy and its balancing strategy between Israel, Palestine, and the Arab world. Finally, few studies combine realist and constructivist perspectives to explain both the ideological and strategic dimensions of India–Israel relations. This study addresses these gaps by integrating historical analysis with contemporary developments and by examining how ideology, security, technology, economic interests, and changing regional politics together transformed India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative historical research design to examine the transformation of India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership. A qualitative historical approach is the most suitable method because the study seeks to understand how political ideas, diplomatic decisions, historical events, and changing strategic interests shaped bilateral relations over time. The evolution of India–Israel relations cannot be adequately explained through statistical data alone because it involves foreign policy choices, ideological

commitments, diplomatic narratives, and geopolitical change across different historical periods. A qualitative historical method therefore allows the study to trace continuity and change in India’s policy toward Israel from 1948 to the present and to explain why important shifts occurred at specific moments, particularly during the end of the Cold War, the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, and the emergence of a strategic partnership in the twenty-first century.

The study relies primarily on qualitative content analysis and historical interpretation. It examines official policy statements, speeches by political leaders, bilateral agreements, diplomatic documents, government reports, and scholarly literature. Particular attention is given to major events and turning points, including India’s recognition of Israel in 1950, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, India’s economic reforms in 1991, the normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1992, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Israel in 2017, the Abraham Accords, the emergence of I2U2, IMEC, and India’s response to the Gaza conflict after 2023. By examining these events in sequence, the study identifies patterns of continuity and change in India’s foreign policy toward Israel.

The analysis is guided by both constructivist and realist perspectives within international relations theory because neither approach alone can fully explain the evolution of India–Israel relations. Constructivism is used to explain India’s early diplomatic distance from Israel during the Cold War. This perspective emphasizes the importance of ideology, historical identity, anti-colonial values, support for Palestine, and India’s commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement. These factors shaped how Indian leaders understood Israel and the Arab world during the first decades after independence. However, constructivism alone cannot explain the major changes that occurred after 1992. Therefore, realism is also used because it highlights the importance of security concerns, strategic interests, military cooperation, economic modernisation, and technological advantages. The realist perspective helps explain why India moved closer to Israel after the Cold War, particularly in response to changing geopolitical conditions, defence requirements, and the need for new strategic partnerships. Combining constructivism and realism therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of both continuity and change in India–Israel relations.

The study is based primarily on secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal

articles, policy papers, government publications, speeches, and reports issued by think tanks and international organizations. Sources were selected according to three criteria:

relevance, credibility, and recency. First, only sources directly related to India–Israel relations, India’s foreign policy, West Asian politics, defence cooperation, and regional diplomacy were included. Second, priority was given to peer-reviewed scholarship, official government publications, and works produced by recognised scholars and institutions such as the Observer Research Foundation, the Indian Council of World Affairs, and the Ministry of External Affairs. Third, the study includes both classic works and recent sources published between 2020 and 2025 in order to capture recent developments such as the Abraham Accords, I2U2, IMEC, and the Gaza conflict. Sources were evaluated by comparing different interpretations and identifying areas of agreement and disagreement among scholars. This comparative approach helps ensure that the study does not rely on a single viewpoint and provides a balanced and well-supported analysis of the transformation of India–Israel relations.

Limitations:

Although this study provides a detailed analysis of the transformation of India–Israel relations, several limitations should be acknowledged. Recognising these limitations helps clarify the scope of the research and identify areas where further study may provide additional insights. First, the research relies primarily on secondary sources of information, including academic books, journal articles, and policy analyses. While these sources provide valuable scholarly perspectives on India–Israel relations, the study does not include extensive examination of primary diplomatic documents, government archives, or classified policy records. Access to such primary materials may provide deeper insight into the decision-making processes that shaped diplomatic relations between the two countries. Second, the study focuses mainly on the political and strategic dimensions of India–Israel relations. Although economic, cultural, and technological cooperation are discussed, these areas are not examined in the same depth as diplomatic and security cooperation. Future research could explore the role of economic partnerships, innovation networks, and technological collaboration in greater detail.

Third, the research adopts a broad historical perspective covering several decades, from the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 to the development of strategic cooperation in the twenty-first century. While this

long-term perspective helps identify patterns in the evolution of the relationship, it may limit detailed analysis of specific events, diplomatic negotiations, or policy decisions that occurred during particular periods. Fourth, the study primarily analyses India–Israel relations from the perspective of state-level foreign policy and international relations. It does not fully examine the role of non-state actors such as private companies, research institutions, diaspora communities, or civil society organizations that may also contribute to the development of bilateral relations. Finally, geopolitical developments in West Asia continue to evolve, and these changes may influence the future trajectory of India–Israel relations. As a result, some conclusions drawn in this study may require further reassessment as new political developments emerge in the region. Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the historical evolution and strategic transformation of India–Israel relations. By analysing political, economic, and security factors together, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how bilateral partnerships develop within changing global political environments.

Objectives:

The study aims to examine the transformation of India–Israel relations from limited diplomatic engagement to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The first objective is to analyse the historical factors that shaped India’s early foreign policy toward Israel during the Cold War period. The study also aims to explore the geopolitical changes that led to the normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1992. Another objective is to examine the role of defence cooperation in strengthening bilateral relations between India and Israel. The research also investigates how economic cooperation, technological collaboration, and agricultural partnerships have expanded the scope of bilateral engagement in recent decades. Finally, the study seeks to evaluate the broader geopolitical implications of the India–Israel strategic partnership within the context of contemporary international relations.

India’s Diplomatic Distance from Israel During the Cold War:

India’s cautious diplomatic approach toward Israel during the Cold War period was shaped by domestic political considerations, ideological commitments, and geopolitical realities (Ganguly, 2016; Pant & Kumaraswamy, 2010). Although India recognised the State of Israel in 1950, it did not establish full diplomatic relations with the country until 1992. This

long period of diplomatic distance reflected India's attempt to balance its foreign policy objectives within a complex international environment. One of the most important factors influencing India's early policy toward Israel was its support for the Palestinian cause. After gaining independence in 1947, India adopted a foreign policy that emphasized anti-colonial solidarity and support for national self-determination movements. Indian leaders viewed the Palestinian issue within this broader framework of anti-colonial struggle. As a result, India often supported Palestinian claims in international forums such as the United Nations. Indian policymakers believed that maintaining a pro-Palestinian stance would strengthen India's position among newly independent countries in Asia and Africa (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

Domestic political considerations also influenced India's diplomatic approach. India is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, and policymakers were aware that relations with Israel could influence domestic political debates. Many political leaders believed that strong diplomatic engagement with Israel might create concerns among sections of the population who supported Palestinian self-determination. As a result, India's leadership preferred to maintain a cautious diplomatic position while continuing to express support for the Palestinian cause (Pant, 2016). Another important factor shaping India's policy was its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement and its leadership among newly independent states in Asia and Africa (Acharya, 2014; Ganguly, 2016). During the Cold War, India played a leading role in the formation and development of the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to maintain independence from the power blocs led by the United States and the Soviet Union. Many countries within the movement supported the Palestinian cause and maintained limited relations with Israel. India's diplomatic stance toward Israel was therefore influenced by its desire to maintain solidarity with other NAM member states and preserve its leadership role within the movement (Ganguly, 2016).

India's relations with Arab countries also played a significant role in shaping its diplomatic approach toward Israel. Several Arab states were important partners for India in areas such as trade, energy supplies, and labour migration. Many Indian workers were employed in the Gulf region, and economic relations with Arab countries were considered vital for India's development. Maintaining strong relations with these countries required India to adopt a careful diplomatic stance on issues related to the Arab-Israeli

conflict (Kumaraswamy, 2018). Energy security further strengthened India's diplomatic caution, as India depended heavily on oil imports from Arab countries in the Middle East (Ayoob, 2012; Halliday, 2005). Many Arab countries were major suppliers of crude oil to India, and stable energy imports were essential for India's economic development. Indian policymakers were therefore careful not to adopt foreign policy positions that might negatively affect relations with oil-producing states in West Asia. Maintaining a balanced approach toward the Arab-Israeli conflict allowed India to protect its economic interests while continuing to support Palestinian political aspirations. The broader geopolitical environment of the Cold War also influenced India's foreign policy decisions. India maintained close relations with the Soviet Union, which was one of its key strategic partners during this period. The Soviet Union supported Arab states in the Middle East and maintained limited relations with Israel. India's diplomatic alignment with the Soviet Union therefore indirectly reinforced its cautious approach toward Israel (Shlaim, 2001).

Despite these diplomatic limitations, India and Israel maintained informal channels of communication and cooperation. Historical records suggest that Israel provided military assistance to India during critical moments such as the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1971 India-Pakistan War. These instances demonstrate that security cooperation existed even during the period of diplomatic distance (Pant, 2016). These interactions highlight an important aspect of India-Israel relations during the Cold War. Although official diplomatic relations remained limited, both countries recognised the potential benefits of cooperation in areas such as security and intelligence. Informal collaboration therefore continued in a discreet manner while India maintained its broader diplomatic commitments in the international arena. India's diplomatic approach toward Israel can therefore be understood as a strategy of balancing multiple foreign policy priorities. On one hand, India supported the Palestinian cause and maintained strong relations with Arab states. On the other hand, it preserved informal communication with Israel and recognised the strategic value of cooperation with the country.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, several geopolitical developments began to alter this diplomatic equation. The end of the Cold War, changes in Middle Eastern politics, and India's own economic reforms encouraged policymakers to reassess their foreign policy priorities. These developments eventually led to the establishment of

full diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992. The Cold War period therefore represents an important phase in the evolution of India–Israel relations. It demonstrates how domestic political considerations, geopolitical alliances, economic interests, and ideological commitments shaped India’s cautious diplomatic approach toward Israel during the early decades of the relationship.

Diplomatic Normalisation and the Post–Cold War Shift:

The establishment of full diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992 marked a major turning point in bilateral diplomacy and strategic cooperation (Blarel, 2015; Kumaraswamy, 2018). For more than four decades after recognising Israel in 1950, India had maintained a cautious diplomatic distance from the country. However, significant changes in global politics, regional dynamics, and India’s own foreign policy priorities during the late 1980s and early 1990s encouraged a reassessment of this approach. The normalisation of relations in 1992 therefore reflected broader geopolitical transformations rather than a sudden shift in policy.

One of the most important factors influencing this change was the end of the Cold War, which transformed global political alignments and diplomatic priorities (Acharya, 2014; Miller, 2013). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 significantly altered the international political system. During the Cold War, India had maintained close political and strategic relations with the Soviet Union. This partnership shaped many aspects of India’s foreign policy, including its cautious diplomatic approach toward Israel. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, India was required to redefine its international relationships and adjust its diplomatic strategies in a rapidly changing global environment (Ganguly, 2016). The end of the Cold War also created opportunities for countries to diversify their foreign policy partnerships. Many states began to expand diplomatic and economic engagement with a wider range of countries. India’s foreign policy began to reflect these changes by strengthening relations with major global powers, regional partners, and technologically advanced states. Israel emerged as an attractive partner because of its expertise in defence technology, agriculture, and innovation (Kumaraswamy, 2018).

Another important factor that influenced the normalisation of relations was India’s economic liberalisation in 1991. Faced with a serious economic crisis, India introduced major economic reforms aimed at integrating the country more closely with the global economy. These reforms encouraged greater

international trade, technological cooperation, and foreign investment. Establishing diplomatic relations with Israel created opportunities for collaboration in areas such as agriculture, water management, and technological development, which were important for India’s modernisation efforts (Pant, 2016). Regional developments in the Middle East also contributed to the shift in India’s policy. The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, which brought together Israel and several Arab states for negotiations, created a new diplomatic environment in West Asia. The conference signalled the possibility of dialogue between Israel and its Arab neighbours and reduced some of the diplomatic tensions associated with the Arab–Israeli conflict. This development made it easier for countries such as India to reconsider their diplomatic positions toward Israel (Shlaim, 2001).

At the same time, India’s relations with Arab states were evolving. Many Arab countries were themselves engaging in dialogue with Israel or reconsidering their diplomatic strategies in the region. This changing environment allowed India to establish relations with Israel without significantly damaging its relations with Arab partners. India therefore adopted a policy that sought to maintain friendly relations with both Israel and the Arab world while continuing to support Palestinian aspirations for statehood. Another factor encouraging normalisation was the growing importance of security cooperation. During the late twentieth century, India faced increasing security challenges related to regional conflicts and terrorism. Israel had developed advanced expertise in defence technology, intelligence operations, and counter-terrorism strategies. Cooperation with Israel therefore offered potential advantages for India’s security planning (Barak & Sheffer, 2012).

Although diplomatic relations were established only in 1992, contacts between the two countries had existed for several decades. Informal security cooperation and intelligence exchanges had taken place earlier, particularly during periods of military conflict involving India. These interactions demonstrated that both countries recognised the potential benefits of collaboration even before formal diplomatic engagement was established. Political leadership also played an important role in facilitating the shift in India’s policy. Indian policymakers recognised that the global political environment was changing rapidly and that India needed to adapt its foreign policy accordingly. Establishing diplomatic relations with Israel was therefore part of a broader strategy aimed at expanding India’s international partnerships and strengthening its position in the global system (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

The normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1992 created new opportunities for bilateral cooperation. Embassies were established in both countries, and diplomatic engagement gradually expanded across multiple sectors. Political dialogue, economic cooperation, and technological collaboration began to develop more rapidly during the following decades. The transformation of India–Israel relations after 1992 illustrates how global political change can reshape bilateral diplomacy. The end of the Cold War, economic reform in India, and evolving political conditions in the Middle East all contributed to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. These developments created the foundation for the strategic partnership that emerged in the following decades.

Defence Cooperation and Strategic Partnership:

Defence cooperation has become one of the most important pillars of the strategic partnership between India and Israel, particularly in areas such as missile defence, surveillance technology, and intelligence cooperation (Barak & Sheffer, 2012; Pant, 2016). Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, collaboration in defence technology, intelligence sharing, and security cooperation has expanded significantly. Israel has emerged as one of India's major defence partners, supplying advanced military technology and providing expertise in areas such as surveillance systems, missile defence, and unmanned aerial vehicles. This defence partnership has played a key role in strengthening bilateral relations and expanding strategic cooperation between the two countries. One important reason for the growth of defence cooperation is the shared security concerns faced by both countries. India and Israel have both experienced security challenges related to regional conflicts and terrorism. These common concerns have encouraged cooperation in intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism strategies, and defence technology development. Security collaboration has therefore become a natural area of partnership between the two countries (Pant, 2016).

Israel's advanced defence technology has been particularly attractive to India. Over several decades, Israel has developed strong capabilities in areas such as missile systems, electronic warfare, border surveillance, and intelligence technology. India has sought to modernize its armed forces and strengthen its defence infrastructure, and cooperation with Israel has helped achieve these goals. Israeli defence companies have supplied India with advanced systems that improve surveillance, reconnaissance, and

battlefield communication (Barak & Sheffer, 2012). One of the most important areas of cooperation has been missile defence technology and joint defence development programmes (Levy, 2015; Maoz, 2009). Joint development projects between Indian and Israeli defence industries have produced several advanced systems. For example, the Barak missile defence system represents an important example of collaboration between the two countries. These systems enhance India's ability to defend against aerial threats and strengthen its overall defence preparedness.

Another area of cooperation involves unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and surveillance technology. Israel is considered one of the world leaders in drone technology, and India has acquired several Israeli UAV systems for reconnaissance and intelligence purposes. These systems help monitor borders, gather intelligence, and support military operations in difficult terrains. Such technological cooperation has significantly improved India's defence capabilities. Defence cooperation between India and Israel also includes joint research and development programmes. Instead of relying only on the purchase of defence equipment, both countries have increasingly focused on collaborative development of military technologies. Joint projects allow India to develop indigenous capabilities while benefiting from Israeli technological expertise. This approach aligns with India's broader defence modernisation strategy and its emphasis on domestic defence production (Kumaraswamy, 2018).

Intelligence cooperation represents another important dimension of the strategic partnership. Both countries have faced challenges related to terrorism and regional instability. As a result, intelligence agencies from India and Israel have cooperated in areas such as information sharing, counter-terrorism training, and security coordination. These efforts have helped both countries improve their ability to respond to security threats. Military training and defence exchanges have also contributed to strengthening bilateral relations. Officials, military officers, and defence experts from both countries participate in training programmes, joint exercises, and defence consultations. These exchanges help develop mutual understanding between the armed forces of the two countries and encourage cooperation in security planning.

High-level political engagement has further reinforced defence collaboration. Visits by political leaders and defence officials have created opportunities to expand strategic cooperation. For example, the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra

Modi to Israel in 2017 was widely viewed as a milestone in bilateral relations. During this visit, both countries emphasized the importance of strengthening defence cooperation and technological partnership. Economic factors have also influenced the growth of defence collaboration. Israel's defence industry is highly innovative and technologically advanced. Cooperation with Israeli companies allows India to access cutting-edge technologies that enhance the capabilities

of its armed forces. At the same time, India represents a major market for Israeli defence products, creating economic incentives for continued cooperation. Despite the strong defence partnership, both countries have sought to maintain balanced diplomatic relations with other regional actors. India continues to maintain friendly relations with Arab states and supports a peaceful resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Israel also recognizes the importance of India's broader diplomatic priorities in the Middle East. As a result, defence cooperation has developed within a broader framework of diplomatic balance and strategic pragmatism.

Economic, Technological, and Agricultural Cooperation:

Economic, technological, and agricultural cooperation has become one of the most dynamic dimensions of India–Israel relations since the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992. While defence cooperation remains a major pillar of the partnership, economic and technological collaboration has broadened the relationship and transformed it into a multidimensional strategic partnership. Bilateral cooperation now extends across trade, agriculture, water management, innovation, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, start-up ecosystems, and research and development.

Bilateral trade between India and Israel has expanded significantly over the last three decades. In the early 1990s, trade between the two countries remained limited. However, by 2023 bilateral trade, excluding defence transactions, reached approximately US\$10 billion. Major sectors of trade include diamonds, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, agricultural products, information technology, telecommunications equipment, and electronic goods. India exports products such as petroleum products, chemicals, textiles, and machinery to Israel, while Israel exports diamonds, fertilizers, agricultural technologies, medical equipment, and advanced technological products to India. Although diamonds continue to account for a large share of bilateral trade, non-diamond trade has grown steadily,

indicating the increasing diversification of economic relations.

Investment cooperation has also increased in recent years. Israeli companies have shown strong interest in India's rapidly expanding market, particularly in sectors such as cybersecurity, financial technology, renewable energy, smart cities, healthcare, and water management. Similarly, Indian firms have invested in Israel's high-technology sector, especially in software, pharmaceuticals, and digital innovation. Major Indian companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, and Jain Irrigation have developed business partnerships or investments in Israel. At the same time, Israeli firms such as Watergen, Netafim, and Mobileye have increased their presence in India.

Agricultural cooperation has emerged as one of the most visible areas of bilateral engagement. Israel's expertise in drip irrigation, micro-irrigation, desert farming, water conservation, and precision agriculture is highly relevant for India, where agriculture remains a major source of employment and where farmers often face water scarcity and climate-related challenges. Since 2008, India and Israel have established more than 30 Centres of Excellence in Agriculture across several Indian states. These centres provide training to farmers, demonstrate advanced agricultural technologies, and promote efficient irrigation systems. Israeli techniques have contributed to increased productivity in horticulture, fruit cultivation, and water management.

Technological and innovation cooperation has expanded rapidly in recent years and now represents one of the most important aspects of the bilateral relationship. Israel is widely regarded as a global innovation hub, while India possesses a large technology sector and one of the world's fastest-growing digital economies. As a result, both countries have increasingly focused on collaboration in innovation, start-up development, and research partnerships. One of the most important initiatives in this area is the India–Israel Industrial Research and Development and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F), established in 2017. The fund, with a joint allocation of approximately US\$40 million, supports collaborative research and innovation projects between Indian and Israeli companies. Projects supported by the fund focus on areas such as healthcare, clean energy, agriculture, digital technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and water management.

Start-up cooperation has become a particularly important feature of India–Israel relations. Israel is

often described as the “Start-Up Nation” because of its strong innovation ecosystem, while India has one of the world’s largest start-up sectors. Governments, universities, and private companies from both countries have therefore encouraged greater cooperation between entrepreneurs, technology firms, incubators, and research centres. Several programmes, such as India–Israel Innovation Bridge and bilateral start-up exchanges, have been created to encourage collaboration between young entrepreneurs. These initiatives focus on sectors such as financial technology, health technology, agritech, cybersecurity, and digital services. Indian start-ups benefit from Israeli expertise in innovation and venture capital, while Israeli companies gain access to India’s large market and skilled workforce.

Cybersecurity has emerged as another major area of cooperation. Both India and Israel face increasing cyber threats related to terrorism, critical infrastructure, financial systems, and national security. Israel is recognised as one of the world’s leading countries in cybersecurity, and India has sought to benefit from Israeli expertise in this field. Cooperation includes joint training programmes, exchange of cyber intelligence, protection of digital infrastructure, and partnerships between technology firms. Indian and Israeli companies have collaborated on cyber defence technologies, secure communication systems, and software for critical infrastructure protection. Cybersecurity cooperation has become especially important because both countries increasingly depend on digital systems in sectors such as banking, defence, transport, and energy.

Artificial intelligence has also become an important field of bilateral cooperation. In recent years, India and Israel have expanded collaboration in artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, and data analytics. Research institutions, universities, and private companies from both countries are involved in joint projects related to AI-based agriculture, healthcare, smart cities, defence systems, and predictive analytics. Israeli expertise in advanced technologies and India’s strengths in software development and large-scale digital implementation make the two countries complementary partners. Several bilateral initiatives have encouraged cooperation in AI-driven innovation, especially in sectors such as agriculture, medical technology, autonomous systems, and public services.

Water management and environmental technology continue to remain important aspects of economic and technological cooperation. Israel has developed advanced technologies in desalination,

wastewater recycling, and efficient water use. These technologies are particularly valuable for India because many regions face water scarcity and climate-related stress. Joint projects in water conservation, urban water supply, and irrigation management have therefore become increasingly important.

The expansion of economic, technological, and agricultural cooperation demonstrates that India–Israel relations are no longer driven solely by defence and security concerns. The relationship increasingly reflects broader patterns of economic interdependence, technological innovation, and strategic collaboration. Bilateral trade, investment, innovation funds, start-up partnerships, cybersecurity cooperation, and artificial intelligence projects have together transformed India–Israel relations into a comprehensive and future-oriented partnership.

Geopolitical Implications of the India–Israel Partnership:

The strategic partnership between India and Israel has important geopolitical implications for regional security and global diplomacy (Barak & Sheffer, 2012; Pant & Kumaraswamy, 2010). Over the past three decades, the relationship has expanded beyond diplomatic engagement to include cooperation in defence, technology, intelligence, agriculture, and innovation. These developments have strengthened bilateral ties while also influencing India’s broader foreign policy in West Asia and the global strategic environment.

One important geopolitical implication of the partnership is the diversification of India’s foreign policy in West Asia. Traditionally, India maintained strong diplomatic and economic relations with Arab countries, particularly because of energy imports and the presence of a large Indian workforce in the Gulf region. The development of closer relations with Israel demonstrates India’s effort to balance its diplomatic engagement with multiple actors in the region. India has therefore adopted a policy that seeks to maintain positive relations with both Israel and Arab countries while continuing to support the Palestinian cause (Kumaraswamy, 2010). This balanced approach has become more visible in recent years as India has expanded its engagement with several countries in the region simultaneously. India maintains strategic partnerships with Israel while also strengthening political and economic cooperation with countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states. This diplomatic strategy allows India to pursue its economic and security interests without aligning exclusively with any single regional bloc.

Another important implication concerns the growing importance of strategic partnerships in global politics. International relations today are increasingly shaped by flexible partnerships rather than rigid alliances. The India–Israel relationship reflects this trend. Both countries cooperate in areas of mutual interest such as defence technology, cybersecurity, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism while maintaining independent foreign policies. This model of cooperation allows both countries to pursue strategic goals without entering formal military alliances (Pant, 2016). The partnership also contributes to regional security cooperation. Both India and Israel face security challenges related to terrorism and regional instability. Collaboration in intelligence sharing, surveillance technologies, and counter-terrorism training helps both countries improve their security capabilities. Such cooperation also contributes to broader international efforts aimed at combating transnational security threats.

Technological cooperation between India and Israel has additional geopolitical significance in the context of the global knowledge economy and technological competition (Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2013). Israel is known for its strong innovation ecosystem, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and advanced defence technologies. India, with its large technological workforce and rapidly expanding digital economy, provides opportunities for large-scale technological collaboration. This partnership strengthens the technological capabilities of both countries and contributes to their competitiveness in the global knowledge economy (Kumaraswamy, 2018). Another geopolitical dimension involves the changing dynamics of the Middle East peace process. Historically, India strongly supported the Palestinian cause and maintained limited relations with Israel. In recent decades, India has continued to support a peaceful resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict while simultaneously expanding its partnership with Israel. This approach reflects India's broader diplomatic strategy of maintaining constructive relations with multiple actors in complex regional environments.

High-level diplomatic engagement between India and Israel has also influenced international perceptions of the relationship. Visits by political leaders, including the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel, symbolised the growing importance of the partnership. These diplomatic exchanges highlight the increasing visibility of India–Israel relations within global political discourse. Economic cooperation between the two countries also has geopolitical

implications. Technological partnerships, investment collaboration, and innovation initiatives strengthen economic connections between India and Israel. Such cooperation contributes to economic development while also creating opportunities for joint participation in global technology markets.

At the same time, both countries have been careful to ensure that the partnership does not disrupt their relations with other international partners. India continues to maintain strong relations with Arab states and remains supportive of Palestinian aspirations for statehood. Israel also recognizes India's broader diplomatic interests in the Middle East and Asia. As a result, the strategic partnership operates within a framework of diplomatic balance and mutual respect for each country's broader foreign policy priorities. The geopolitical significance of the India–Israel relationship is therefore not limited to bilateral cooperation. It reflects broader trends in international politics, including the growing importance of technological collaboration, flexible strategic partnerships, and multidimensional diplomacy. These developments illustrate how countries adapt their foreign policies in response to changing global political conditions.

Findings:

The analysis of historical developments and scholarly literature reveals several important patterns in the transformation of India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership. These findings highlight how geopolitical changes, security cooperation, technological collaboration, and economic engagement contributed to the gradual strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries. One major result of the study is that India's early diplomatic distance from Israel was shaped by a combination of domestic political considerations and international diplomatic priorities. During the Cold War period, India maintained a cautious approach toward Israel while expressing strong support for Palestinian self-determination. This policy was influenced by India's leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement, its commitment to anti-colonial solidarity, and the need to maintain stable relations with Arab countries that were important partners for trade, energy supplies, and labour migration.

A second important finding concerns the impact of global political changes after the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new international political environment encouraged India to reassess its foreign policy priorities. Economic reforms introduced in India in the early 1990s also promoted greater international

engagement and technological cooperation. Within this changing global context, India established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, marking a significant shift in bilateral relations. The study also demonstrates that defence cooperation became a central pillar of the strategic partnership between India and Israel. Israel's expertise in defence technology, missile systems, intelligence operations, and surveillance equipment has played a significant role in India's military modernisation. Collaboration in areas such as missile defence systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and electronic warfare technologies has strengthened security cooperation between the two countries.

Another key finding relates to the expansion of economic, technological, and agricultural partnerships. Since the normalisation of relations, cooperation has extended beyond defence to include sectors such as agricultural innovation, water management, cybersecurity, and research and development. Israeli expertise in drip irrigation, desert farming, and water conservation has contributed to improvements in agricultural practices in several Indian states. Technological collaboration between research institutions, start-up companies, and innovation centres has further strengthened bilateral engagement. The findings also highlight the geopolitical significance of the India-Israel partnership in the context of contemporary international relations. India has adopted a balanced diplomatic approach that allows it to maintain strong relations with both Israel and Arab states. This strategy reflects India's broader foreign policy objective of diversifying its international partnerships while protecting its economic and security interests in the Middle East. Another important result concerns the role of shared security concerns in strengthening bilateral cooperation. Both India and Israel face challenges related to terrorism and regional instability. Collaboration in intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism training, and surveillance technology has therefore become an important aspect of the strategic partnership.

Discussion:

The findings of this study provide important insights into the transformation of India-Israel relations and illustrate how international partnerships evolve in response to changing geopolitical conditions. The discussion highlights the interaction between historical diplomacy, strategic interests, economic cooperation, and global political changes that contributed to the development of the India-Israel strategic partnership. One of the key observations from the study is that India's early diplomatic distance from Israel was not a

result of hostility but rather a strategic balancing of foreign policy priorities. During the Cold War period, India's foreign policy was strongly influenced by its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement and its support for anti-colonial struggles around the world. India viewed the Palestinian issue within this broader framework of decolonization and self-determination. As a result, Indian policymakers adopted a cautious diplomatic approach toward Israel while maintaining strong relations with Arab countries.

At the same time, the analysis shows that diplomatic distance did not completely prevent interaction between India and Israel. Informal security cooperation and discreet diplomatic contacts continued during the Cold War. These interactions indicate that both countries recognised the potential benefits of cooperation even when formal diplomatic engagement remained limited. The end of the Cold War created a new international political environment that encouraged countries to reassess their diplomatic priorities. India's economic reforms and the collapse of the Soviet Union significantly altered the strategic context of its foreign policy. These changes created opportunities for India to expand its international partnerships and engage with countries that possessed technological and strategic capabilities beneficial to its development.

The normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1992 represented a logical outcome of these broader geopolitical changes and the reorientation of India's foreign policy after the Cold War (Blarel, 2015; Kumaraswamy, 2018). It allowed both countries to develop open diplomatic communication and explore new areas of cooperation. Over time, bilateral relations expanded rapidly and evolved into a strategic partnership that includes defence collaboration, technological exchange, and economic engagement. Defence cooperation emerged as one of the most important elements of the relationship. Israel's advanced defence technology and expertise in intelligence operations provided important support for India's efforts to modernize its military capabilities. Collaboration in areas such as missile defence systems, surveillance technology, and counter-terrorism strategies strengthened the security partnership between the two countries.

However, the study also shows that the India-Israel relationship cannot be understood solely in terms of defence cooperation. Economic and technological collaboration have become equally important components of the partnership. Agricultural cooperation, water management initiatives, innovation partnerships, and research collaboration have

broadened the scope of bilateral engagement and contributed to economic development in both countries. Another important theme that emerges from the analysis is the balanced diplomatic strategy adopted by India in West Asia. India has maintained strong relations with Israel while simultaneously strengthening ties with Arab states and continuing to support Palestinian aspirations for statehood. This approach reflects India's broader foreign policy objective of maintaining constructive relations with multiple actors in a complex regional environment.

The India–Israel partnership also reflects broader trends in international relations. Contemporary diplomacy increasingly involves flexible partnerships based on mutual interests rather than rigid alliances. Countries cooperate in specific sectors such as technology, defence, or trade while maintaining independent foreign policy positions. The relationship between India and Israel represents an example of this multidimensional approach to international cooperation. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the transformation of India–Israel relations was shaped by the interaction of historical diplomacy, geopolitical change, security cooperation, and technological collaboration. The evolution of the relationship illustrates how states adapt their foreign policies in response to changing global conditions while pursuing national interests and strategic partnerships.

Theoretical and Policy Implications:

The transformation of India–Israel relations offers several important insights for scholars and policymakers studying international relations, strategic partnerships, and foreign policy evolution. The findings of this study highlight how diplomatic relationships can change over time as states respond to shifts in global politics, regional dynamics, and national interests.

From a theoretical perspective, the study supports arguments within constructivist and realist approaches to international relations. Constructivist perspectives emphasize the importance of historical experience, political identity, and diplomatic narratives in shaping foreign policy decisions. India's early support for the Palestinian cause and its commitment to anti-colonial solidarity influenced its diplomatic approach toward Israel during the Cold War. At the same time, realist perspectives highlight the importance of security concerns, technological advantages, and strategic interests in shaping bilateral cooperation. The growth of defence collaboration and intelligence sharing

between India and Israel reflects these strategic considerations.

The study also contributes to research on strategic partnerships in contemporary international politics. Unlike traditional military alliances, modern partnerships often focus on cooperation in specific sectors such as defence technology, innovation, economic development, and security coordination. The India–Israel relationship demonstrates how countries can expand cooperation in areas of mutual interest while maintaining independent foreign policies and balanced diplomatic relations with other states. In addition, the research highlights the role of technological collaboration and economic engagement in strengthening international partnerships. Cooperation in agriculture, water management, cybersecurity, and innovation has expanded the scope of India–Israel relations beyond defence cooperation. These developments illustrate how technological and economic partnerships can contribute to long-term diplomatic engagement and mutual development.

The findings also have important policy implications for India's broader foreign policy strategy in West Asia. India's balanced diplomatic approach, maintaining strong relations with Israel while preserving ties with Arab states, demonstrates a pragmatic strategy for managing complex regional relationships. This approach allows India to pursue security cooperation and technological collaboration with Israel while protecting its economic and political interests in the broader Middle East region. For policymakers, the India–Israel partnership also illustrates the importance of multidimensional diplomacy. Cooperation across sectors such as defence, agriculture, technology, and research strengthens bilateral relations and creates opportunities for long-term collaboration. Expanding educational exchanges, innovation partnerships, and scientific research initiatives may further enhance the relationship between the two countries.

Future Research:

Future research could explore several additional dimensions of India–Israel relations.

- First, scholars may examine the role of private sector collaboration and start-up innovation networks in strengthening economic ties between the two countries. Israel's dynamic technology sector and India's rapidly expanding digital economy provide significant opportunities for technological cooperation.
- Second, future studies may analyse the role of diaspora communities and cultural diplomacy in shaping public perceptions and social

connections between India and Israel. Cultural exchange, tourism, and educational partnerships may contribute to deeper people-to-people relations between the two societies.

- Third, researchers could examine how regional geopolitical developments in West Asia influence the future trajectory of India–Israel relations. Changes in regional alliances, energy markets, and diplomatic initiatives may create new opportunities and challenges for the partnership.
- Finally, comparative research examining India’s strategic partnerships with other countries may provide additional insights into the evolution of contemporary diplomacy. Such studies could help explain how emerging powers develop flexible partnerships in an increasingly interconnected international system.

Conclusion:

The transformation of India–Israel relations from diplomatic distance to strategic partnership represents one of the most significant shifts in India’s foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. For several decades after independence, India maintained a cautious approach toward Israel because of its support for the Palestinian cause, its commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement, domestic political considerations, and the importance of maintaining close relations with Arab countries. Although limited security cooperation existed during this period, India avoided full diplomatic engagement with Israel until 1992.

The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and India’s economic liberalisation created a new international environment that encouraged India to reconsider its diplomatic priorities. Since the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992, India and Israel have developed a multidimensional partnership that includes defence cooperation, agricultural development, water management, technological innovation, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and regional connectivity. More recent developments, including the Abraham Accords, I2U2, IMEC, and India’s response to the Gaza conflict, have further strengthened the strategic significance of the relationship.

However, the importance of India–Israel relations extends beyond the bilateral level. The evolution of the relationship reveals a broader transformation in the nature of Indian foreign policy. India has gradually moved away from an ideology-driven approach based primarily on anti-colonial solidarity and non-alignment toward a more pragmatic

strategy of multi- alignment and strategic autonomy. Rather than choosing between Israel and the Arab world, India increasingly seeks to maintain productive relations with all major actors in West Asia while pursuing its own security, economic, and geopolitical interests.

India–Israel relations therefore illustrate how contemporary Indian foreign policy is shaped by flexibility, strategic pragmatism, and issue-based partnerships. The relationship demonstrates that India is increasingly willing to cooperate simultaneously with states that may have conflicting interests, provided such cooperation advances India’s national objectives. In this sense, the India–Israel partnership is not merely an example of bilateral cooperation; it is a reflection of India’s emergence as a more confident and adaptive power in an increasingly multipolar world.

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