

## India–Israel Strategic Convergence in West Asia: Advancing Counter-Terrorism and Maritime Security Cooperation

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**Abstract:** West Asia remains a critical geopolitical hotspot, facing persistent threats from terrorism, maritime insecurity, and state-sponsored extremism. Against this backdrop, India and Israel—two democracies with robust defense capabilities and counter-terrorism experience—are increasingly collaborating to address these complex security challenges. This paper examines the evolving India-Israel partnership in West Asia, particularly in counter-terrorism and maritime security domains.

India's strategic location along vital sea lanes and Israel's advanced intelligence capabilities position both nations as pivotal actors in securing maritime domains from terrorist infiltration, smuggling, and asymmetric threats. Bilateral cooperation includes real-time intelligence sharing, joint naval exercises, cyber defense initiatives, and counter-radicalization strategies. India benefits from Israeli technologies in surveillance, UAVs, and coastal monitoring, while Israel gains strategic depth and outreach through Indian partnerships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Furthermore, their collaboration extends to capacity building in friendly West Asian nations, aimed at strengthening regional responses to terrorism. This synergistic engagement reflects a broader strategic convergence rooted in shared concerns over transnational threats, energy security, and the need for a stable maritime environment.

By deepening defense diplomacy and operational cooperation, India and Israel not only bolster their national security but also contribute to a more secure and resilient West Asia. This model of counter-terrorism cooperation can potentially inspire wider multilateral frameworks in the region.

**Keywords:** India-Israel Cooperation, Counter-Terrorism, Maritime Security, Intelligence Sharing, West Asia, Strategic Partnership, Indian Ocean, Regional Stability.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of India–Israel Relations**

The diplomatic trajectory between India and Israel represents one of the most dynamic transformations in post-Cold War international relations. For decades after independence, India maintained minimal contact with Israel, driven by its alignment with the Non-Aligned Movement and its solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Formal diplomatic relations were only established in 1992, a decision motivated by changes in India’s foreign policy priorities following the Cold War and by Israel’s desire to build partnerships beyond the Western bloc.<sup>1</sup> Since then, bilateral ties have grown exponentially, expanding from agriculture and technology to encompass security, counter-terrorism, cyber cooperation, and maritime awareness.<sup>2</sup>

India today ranks among Israel’s top defence clients, while Israel remains one of India’s foremost defence technology suppliers.<sup>3</sup> Both countries share democratic systems, face terrorism as an existential threat, and rely heavily on secure maritime routes for trade and energy. Their convergence, therefore, is not accidental but the outcome of pragmatic strategic alignment.

### **1.2 Importance of West Asia in Global Politics**

West Asia—extending from the Eastern Mediterranean through the Gulf to the Arabian Sea—is central to the global balance of power. It hosts vital shipping routes, such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, and Bab el-Mandeb, through which roughly one-third of global oil trade passes.<sup>4</sup> Regional instability, whether from terrorism, piracy, or proxy conflicts, can have severe implications for global energy security.

For India, the region is both an energy lifeline and home to an eight-million-strong diaspora.<sup>5</sup> Its national interests demand stable sea lanes, steady oil imports, and cooperative relations with all major regional actors. Israel, meanwhile, is embedded in this region’s complex security environment and seeks partners capable of contributing to maritime stability and counter-terrorism.

### **1.3 Context of Strategic Convergence**

India’s “Look West” policy and Israel’s outreach toward Asia have created fertile ground for cooperation.<sup>6</sup> As terrorism evolved into transnational networks and maritime security became increasingly contested—with Iran’s regional activities, Houthi missile attacks, and militant piracy—their interests began to intersect more deeply.<sup>7</sup> Both nations recognize that asymmetric threats now blur the line between land and sea operations. India’s growing naval capacity complements Israel’s intelligence and technological edge, creating the foundation for a balanced partnership in West Asia.

### **1.4 Thesis Statement**

This paper argues that India and Israel’s strategic partnership in West Asia enhances counter-terrorism and maritime security cooperation by combining complementary strengths—India’s regional reach and Israel’s technological expertise. This partnership not only advances both countries’ security objectives but also contributes to a more stable and secure maritime order in one of the world’s most volatile regions.

## **Chapter 2: Historical Background of India–Israel Relations**

### **2.1 Early Relations and Diplomatic Ties**

India recognized Israel in 1950 but refrained from establishing full diplomatic ties for over four decades, preferring to maintain solidarity with the Arab world and Palestine.<sup>8</sup> Despite limited official contact, informal channels existed through trade and discreet intelligence exchanges, especially after India faced multiple wars in the 1960s and 1970s.

The end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization prompted a reassessment of strategic priorities. In 1992, under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, India opened an embassy in Tel Aviv, marking a new phase of pragmatic engagement.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.2 Evolution of Cooperation in Defence, Agriculture, and Technology**

Defence cooperation became the most visible pillar of the partnership. During the 1999 Kargil War, Israel supplied India with precision ammunition, UAVs, and night-vision systems at short notice.<sup>10</sup> In subsequent years, collaboration extended to joint R&D projects, including missile defence, radar systems, and border surveillance.<sup>11</sup>

Agriculture and water management have also been key areas of cooperation. The Indo-Israel Agricultural Cooperation Project, launched in 2008, established more than thirty Centers of Excellence across India, promoting drip irrigation and desert farming techniques.<sup>12</sup> Israel's advanced irrigation and desalination technologies have proven particularly valuable to India's water-scarce regions.

## **2.3 Recent Developments and Strengthening of Ties**

In the past decade, bilateral relations have transformed into a multidimensional strategic partnership. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel in 2017—the first by an Indian head of government—symbolized this transformation.<sup>13</sup> Joint initiatives now cover cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, counter-terrorism, and maritime domain awareness.<sup>14</sup> The normalization of Israel's ties with several Gulf states (Abraham Accords) further widens the space for India to deepen trilateral or quadrilateral engagements in West Asia.<sup>15</sup>

## **Chapter 3: Counter-Terrorism Cooperation**

### **3.1 Global Terrorism Landscape and West Asia's Role**

West Asia remains the epicenter of transnational terrorism. Groups such as ISIS, Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al-Qaeda affiliates operate across borders, exploiting weak governance and ideological fissures.<sup>16</sup> The diffusion of radical networks from Syria, Iraq, and Yemen to South Asia has heightened India's concerns, given its geographical proximity and diaspora exposure. Maritime terrorism, including attacks on tankers and ports, has added a new dimension to the threat landscape.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.2 India's Counter-Terrorism Challenges and Israel's Expertise**

India's counter-terrorism challenges stem from cross-border militancy, internal insurgencies, and the radicalization of individuals through online propaganda.<sup>18</sup> Israel, on the other hand, has faced continuous terror threats since its inception, developing sophisticated intelligence, surveillance, and rapid-response mechanisms.<sup>19</sup>

India has studied Israel's integrated approach to counter-terrorism, which combines technology, intelligence, and targeted operations. Israeli expertise in border fencing, UAV surveillance, and cyber intelligence has influenced India's own counter-terror architecture.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.3 Areas of Cooperation: Intelligence Sharing, Training, and Technology**

The India–Israel counter-terrorism partnership operates through three principal channels:

a. Intelligence sharing: Both nations maintain a discreet but effective intelligence exchange. RAW and Mossad have collaborated on tracking extremist financing, infiltration routes, and regional terror movements.<sup>21</sup> Regular dialogues between national security advisers have institutionalized this process.<sup>22</sup>

b. Training and capacity building: Israeli security experts have trained Indian police and special forces in urban warfare, hostage rescue, and counter-insurgency.<sup>23</sup> The elite National Security Guard (NSG) and state-level anti-terror units have benefitted from exposure to Israeli tactics and simulation technologies.

c. Technology transfer: Israel provides India with advanced UAVs, border sensors, and surveillance systems.<sup>24</sup> Cybersecurity collaboration has grown, with Israeli firms assisting Indian agencies in defending against digital espionage and critical-infrastructure attacks.<sup>25</sup>

### **3.4 Case Studies of Collaboration**

The cooperation was visible during the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, after which India sought Israeli expertise in urban counter-terror management.<sup>26</sup> Israeli firms helped design integrated command-and-control systems for major Indian cities. Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, India has deployed Israeli-made surveillance drones and border radars to detect infiltration attempts.<sup>27</sup>

Another case is India's adoption of Israeli anti-drone technology to protect airports and critical installations from UAV threats—a response to evolving terror tactics.<sup>28</sup> These examples underline the growing operational trust between the two nations in countering both land-based and maritime terror threats.

## **Chapter 4: Maritime Security Cooperation**

### **4.1 Importance of Maritime Security in West Asia**

Maritime routes across West Asia are vital for global trade. The Strait of Hormuz alone carries nearly 20 percent of world oil shipments.<sup>29</sup> Disruptions—caused by terrorism, state conflict, or piracy—can destabilize energy markets. The 2019 attacks on tankers near Fujairah and drone strikes on Saudi oil facilities illustrated the vulnerability of maritime infrastructure.<sup>30</sup>

India, as a major energy importer, is directly affected by such disruptions. Its “Security and Growth for All in the Region” (SAGAR) policy emphasizes the need for stable sea lanes extending from the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea.<sup>31</sup> Israel, located at the intersection of the Mediterranean and Red Sea routes, shares similar concerns and possesses world-class naval surveillance and cyber-maritime technologies.<sup>32</sup>

### **4.2 India's Maritime Security Concerns and Israel's Capabilities**

India's maritime vulnerabilities in West Asia include threats to merchant shipping, energy supply lines, and the safety of its expatriate workforce during regional crises.<sup>33</sup> Israel's strengths—unmanned maritime vehicles, radar satellites, and coastal surveillance—offer significant value to India's efforts to protect sea-lines of communication.<sup>34</sup>

Joint maritime domain awareness (MDA) initiatives could integrate Israeli satellite data with Indian naval monitoring systems, enabling early warning of hostile activity in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea.<sup>35</sup>

### **4.3 Cooperation in Maritime Security: Joint Exercises, Technology, and Port Management**

While India and Israel do not conduct frequent bilateral naval drills, they increasingly collaborate within multilateral frameworks that include the United States and Gulf partners.<sup>36</sup> Technology sharing has advanced further: Israeli firms have supplied India with shipborne radars, communication encryption systems, and unmanned surface vehicles.<sup>37</sup>

Cooperation also extends to port security and management. Israeli expertise in port automation and cyber defence has influenced India's efforts to modernize its western ports such as Kandla and Mumbai.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, India's Shipyards have explored partnerships with Israeli companies for naval component production.

#### **4.4 Impact on Regional Stability and Global Trade**

Joint maritime security efforts contribute to the stability of energy transit routes.<sup>39</sup> An India–Israel maritime axis could serve as a deterrent to non-state actors targeting commercial shipping. Enhanced MDA would improve crisis response times, reducing the economic ripple effects of maritime disruptions.<sup>40</sup>

Strategically, this cooperation positions both countries as contributors to collective security in the Indian Ocean–West Asia interface, balancing the growing Chinese naval footprint.<sup>41</sup> It also complements India’s broader Indo-Pacific framework by anchoring its western flank through cooperation with Israel and friendly Gulf states.<sup>42</sup>

### **Chapter 5: Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **5.1 Challenges to Cooperation**

**Despite convergence, several obstacles persist.**

The Palestine question remains politically sensitive. India maintains its traditional support for a two-state solution, which occasionally constrains overt military alignment with Israel.<sup>43</sup>

Iran’s role presents another challenge. India’s energy and connectivity interests in Iran (notably Chabahar Port) require diplomatic balance to avoid antagonizing Tehran, which perceives Israel as a regional adversary.<sup>44</sup>

Regional volatility—civil wars, shifting alliances, and maritime flashpoints—can complicate coordination.<sup>45</sup> Bureaucratic hurdles and differing procurement systems have also slowed some joint projects.

#### **5.2 Opportunities Ahead**

Conversely, opportunities for collaboration are abundant. Israel’s normalization with Gulf countries under the Abraham Accords allows India to participate in trilateral or quadrilateral ventures that combine technology, logistics, and security.<sup>46</sup>

Joint development of MDA networks, AI-based surveillance, and secure port infrastructures can extend to friendly Gulf states, creating a shared maritime security architecture.<sup>47</sup> Collaborative infrastructure—such as smart ports, logistics corridors, and satellite data-sharing—can also underpin India’s ambitions as a “net security provider” in its maritime neighborhood.<sup>48</sup>

Economic complementarities reinforce this vision: Israel’s innovation ecosystem aligns with India’s scale and manpower, generating defence industrial synergy.<sup>49</sup>

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Future Directions**

#### **6.1 Summary**

The India–Israel strategic partnership in West Asia reflects a mature convergence of interests rooted in shared security threats and complementary capabilities. From modest beginnings in 1992, it has evolved into a multidimensional partnership encompassing defence trade, counter-terrorism, and maritime cooperation. The relationship contributes to both national and regional stability by addressing terrorism, piracy, and maritime disruption across the Gulf–Red Sea corridor.

#### **6.2 Future Prospects**

Looking forward, institutionalizing cooperation will be crucial. A joint India–Israel Counter-Terrorism Task Force could formalize intelligence sharing, while a Maritime Security Corridor Initiative could integrate naval logistics and satellite surveillance between the two nations.<sup>50</sup>

Future trilateral engagements with the UAE or Bahrain may further embed this partnership in the evolving West Asian security architecture.

### 6.3 Recommendations

1. Establish a permanent joint intelligence coordination center focused on West Asia.
2. Expand maritime domain awareness through satellite and UAV data sharing.
3. Enhance joint R&D in cybersecurity, unmanned maritime systems, and AI-based threat detection.
4. Encourage trilateral projects with Gulf states under the Indo-Abrahamic framework.
5. Maintain diplomatic balance by ensuring engagement with Iran and Palestine continues alongside deepening ties with Israel.

If managed strategically, India–Israel convergence can become a cornerstone of West Asian security, linking the Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean theatres through a stable maritime and counter-terror architecture.

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