



'WE FEEL YOUR PAIN.' Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Knesset in Jerusalem on Wednesday during an official state visit, condemning the October 7 attacks and reaffirming India's support for Israel. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

A VISIBLE EXPRESSION of friendship. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu greets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Knesset on Wednesday, marking Modi's first visit to Israel in nearly a decade. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

India and Israel

While Indian PM Modi visits Jerusalem, the 'Post' embeds with the Indian Armed Forces across the subcontinent

INDIA AFFAIRS

By ALEX WINSTON

NEW DELHI – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood at the Knesset podium on Wednesday afternoon and spoke the post-October 7 language of friendship that Israeli leaders love to hear.

"We feel your pain. India stands with Israel firmly, with full conviction in this moment and beyond," the prime minister of the world's most populous country told Israeli parliamentarians after landing in Israel for an official state visit. "Nothing justifies terror."

He went on to say that India would stand with Israel in all counterterrorism efforts, stressing that confronting terrorism requires "sustained and coordinated global action."

Modi explicitly linked India's own security experience to Israel's current war, saying New Delhi supports "all efforts that contribute to regional peace and stability."

He described Israel as "a powerhouse of innovation and technological leadership," calling the relationship between the two countries "a natural basis for a future-oriented partnership."

India and Israel, Modi said, are "ancient civilizations," bound not only by interests but by shared experience. He pointed to the establishment of a parliamentary friendship group, commitments to expand trade and investment, and the bilateral investment treaty signed last year, which he said provided "certainty and clear prospects" for businesses in both countries.

He closed with "Ami Yisrael hai," drawing chants of "Modi" from the plenum and a standing ovation. Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana then placed the Knesset Medal around Modi's neck at the podium.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, welcoming Modi moments earlier, told those gathered the visit was a marker of how far the relationship has moved in the past

couple of years. Calling Modi "a great friend of Israel, and a great leader on the world stage," Netanyahu said the two countries had doubled trade in recent years and built what he described as "a wondrous friendship."

"The alliance between us is an enormous multiplier," Netanyahu said, thanking Modi for his "unwavering" support since October 7. "We are two democracies. We are now deepening our deep bond. Israel is stronger than ever, and India is stronger than ever."

In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* on the eve of the visit, Indian Ambassador J.P. Singh described Modi's visit as a turning point, which could usher in "a new phase... a new chapter" in India-Israel relations, as it has been almost a decade since there has been a bilateral summit at the highest level. "Prime Minister Mr. Modi is visiting after almost nine years... this visit is going to be a very historic visit," Singh said, reiterating its significance and timing.

The Indian prime minister last visited Israel in 2017, when the two countries upgraded their relationship to what New Delhi labeled a strategic partnership. This move, and the subsequent visit by Netanyahu to India in 2018, laid the foundation for future cooperation in the realms of defense and technological innovation.

The strong relationship between India and Israel that exists nowadays took many years to form. For decades, following India's recognition of the State of Israel in 1950, the Indian government kept its relationship with Jerusalem low-key, for reasons of historical support for the Palestinian cause and other geopolitical considerations. Even when full diplomatic relations were established in 1992, it would take another quarter of a century for an Indian prime minister to make a formal state visit.

This began to shift under Modi's leadership. In 2017, his historic visit to Israel represented something of a break with the past – a move from distant diplomacy to direct engagement, especially in security and technology. As one veteran watcher of the relationship explained at the time, "The relationship is moving from arms sales to a

more strategic partnership based on capability and need."

On the defense side, New Delhi has been one of Israel's most important partners, particularly in terms of air defense systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and precision-guided munitions. Over the past decade, Israeli arms exports to India have been on the rise, as India has continued to develop its own domestic military market, and the partnership has expanded from simple collaborations to joint ventures, local production agreements that fit India's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" or self-reliance strategies. Modi has given the timeline of 2047 – the century of Indian independence – for his nation to reduce significantly its dependency on foreign nations.

Indian leaders have described this modernization drive as part of a larger national strategy to achieve defense self-sufficiency. The drive for indigenous development, from aircraft carriers to artillery guns, is all part of Modi's long-term vision of a self-reliant India.

INDIA'S MILITARY strength was on display for the *Post* over the past week, thousands of kilometers east of the Knesset, in the deserts of Rajasthan in northwestern India and the waters of the Bay of Bengal.

The Pokhran Field Firing Ranges in the state of Rajasthan, some 100 kilometers from the Pakistani border, hosted Exercise Agni Varsha on Tuesday, a major live-fire exercise aimed at proving the operational readiness of the Indian Army's combat capabilities in a desert environment. The *Post* was on hand to witness the culmination of a major army exercise that showcased how India carries out modern land warfare.

Pokhran is no ordinary range. For several decades, it has been one of India's premier testing grounds, as much a site for testing new weapons as for conducting military exercises. The range is flat, open, and harsh, with a feel of the Negev about it. Agni Varsha was conducted in several stages, with modern-age drone warfare combined with artillery, air support, and infantry to show India's capabilities.

The mechanized forces moved into the range with T-90S main battle tanks leading the way, accompanied by BMP-2K infantry fighting vehicles. The tanks were protected by artillery fire from K-9 Vajra 155-mm, S2-caliber self-propelled howitzers, the Indian-manufactured version of the South Korean K-9 Thunder, and towed artillery systems positioned further back in the battlespace.

Overhead, the Army Aviation Corps offered close air support and reconnaissance. Indigenous Rudra light attack helicopters, developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited as the armed variant of the Dhruv family, operated in conjunction with AH-64E Apache Guardian attack helicopters with their Israeli technology.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were also given the chance to show what they are capable of. Approximately a dozen fixed- and rotary-wing UAVs were employed across intelligence gathering, surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike missions. Some provided persistent surveillance of advancing troops, while others were used to direct artillery and air assets to targets identified in real time.

Throughout the range, large display boards outlined the development of India's ISR architecture: space-based electro-optical and electronic intelligence satellites, airborne surveillance platforms, ground-based battlefield surveillance and weapon-locating radars, and the networking infrastructure that connected sensors to shooters. Artillery forces demonstrated quick "shoot and scoot" maneuvers, firing salvos before relocating to avoid the effects of counterbattery fire.

Special attention was given to the Shakti Fire Control System, an indigenous automated fire control network intended to integrate multiple artillery systems into a unified operational picture. According to Indian officers, the Shakti Fire Control System represents an important step toward reducing dependence on foreign command-and-control systems and improving response times on the battlefield.

Cumulatively, Agni Varsha presented a telescoped perspective on the Indian Army's process of reorganizing itself for high-tempo operations. Desert warfare has always been a factor in planning along Western India, but the way in which the exercise was conducted indicated a force increasingly influenced by the lessons of recent conflicts around the world, where situational awareness and precision are as important as mass.

These lessons are grounded in real-life experience, which the Indian Armed Forces soberly experienced last year.

Several officers speaking with the *Post* cited Operation Sindoor – the Indian Army's 2025 counterterrorism operation following a terrorist attack by Pakistani-based terrorist groups, which left 26 civilians dead in Kashmir last April – as a formative factor in recent doctrine. Sindoor, which is a mark of pride for the Indians in their response, was characterized by Indian Army planners as a limited, intelligence-led use of force intended to impose costs without necessarily risking escalation.

A glimpse of the Indian Army's capabilities was on show during Sindoor, according to officers who spoke to the *Post* during Agni Varsha – where justice and not revenge was the dish of the day, according to the officers.

In off-the-cuff conversations on the sidelines of the range, comparisons to Israel naturally arose.

There was no need to ask officers about Israeli experience – every single officer spoke of their admiration for Israel. Not just of its military capabilities, but the mindset that comes along with it. They spoke freely of studying Israeli operational experience, especially in contexts where non-state actors operate with the tacit support of states, embed themselves among civilian populations, and seek to provoke overreaction.

For India, the challenge from Pakistan-supported extremist groups has been an old one. The change that has occurred in recent years is the willingness to act with speed and precision while being politically and militarily restrained. This, according to officers, is in line with Israeli experience in dealing with Hamas and Hezbollah.

PRIOR TO the desert, the *Post* spent time in the east of the country, along the Bay of Bengal, where the Indian Navy's maritime ambitions were being showcased.

Off the coast of Visakhapatnam, India's Eastern Naval



INDIA'S PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu reviews 'INS Vikrant' from the review stand during the International Fleet Review 2026 in the Bay of Bengal, hosted by the Indian Navy off Visakhapatnam. (Courtesy Indian Defense Ministry)