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The bromance between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during Modi's recent visit showcased the warmth and affection the two countries share, Avi Benlolo writes.

India's Modi a true friend of Israel

AVI BENLOLO

Friendship is forged not at the mercy of expedience or convenience, but when interest and mutual respect aligns. This week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave an eloquent statesmanlike speech at Israel's parliament (Knesset). He flew to Israel to reinforce the alliance despite the imminent possibility of an attack by Iran. The bromance between Modi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showcased the warmth and affection the two countries share.

After the debacles of the Trudeau government, we can only pray Modi will one day stand in our House of Commons and express the historic unity between Canada and India. That may yet happen given Canada's race to reset its relationship with India in recent months, including Mark Carney's visit this week. India deserves our respect.

Meanwhile, in Israel, Modi said, "It is a privilege and an honour for me to stand before this distinguished House. I do so as the Prime Minister of India, and as a representative of one ancient civilization addressing another. I bring with me the greetings of 1.4 billion Indians, and a message of friendship, respect, and partnership."

In 2017, Modi pivoted his country toward pragmatic diplomacy by becoming the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel. As his Knesset speech conveyed, he recognizes India and Israel have much in common, perhaps more than India's traditional alliance (with the self-destructive) Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The Mumbai attack in 2008 was a wake-up call to the threat of Islamic terrorism and would bring India closer to Israel in this regard.

Modi understands terrorism:

"India has also endured the pain of terrorism," he said, referring to the "barbaric attack by Hamas" on October 7. "We feel your pain. We share your grief. India stands with Israel, firmly, with full conviction, in this moment and beyond." Modi vehemently denounced terrorism. "Like you, we have a consistent and uncompromising policy of zero tolerance for terrorism, with no double standards."

Like Israel, India concerns itself with internal and external threats. Its rivalry and land dispute with Pakistan is long-standing. As recently as May 2025, India launched missile strikes against Pakistan after a terrorist attack. While different, its fight with Pakistan resembles Israel's many disputes, such as with Syria, Lebanon and Iran. Internally, a Sikh minority wants to carve an independent state (Khalistan) out of India, similar to the Palestinians vis-a-vis Israel.

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That's partly why defence and security are the cornerstone of ties between the two nations. Long before the Abraham Accords, India recognized the benefits of aligning with Israel to support its own defence, mainly against Pakistan. The Stockholm International Research Institute says India accounted for 34 per of Israel's total arms exports between 2020 and 2024, adding up to about US\$20.5

billion. It's relatively unknown that Israel quietly supplies India with "missiles, seekers, radars, sensors, electronic warfare suites, UAV technologies and a host of force multipliers." Reflecting on the ties that bind both nations, Modi recalled the ancient Jewish communities of India: "the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, the Cochini Jews of Keralam, the Baghdadi Jews of Kolkata and Mumbai, and the Bnei Menashe of the North East have enriched India. In my home state, Gujarat, there is a school set up by a Bene Israeli family — Mister and Missus Best. It is an excellent school, and of course, it is called the Best School!"

Indeed, aside from the 2008 Mumbai attack in which six Jews were murdered by Islamists, India is one of the few countries on Earth where Jews have lived relatively safely and without persistent antisemitism for centuries. India's relatively pluralistic environment assured that unlike Europe and some parts of the Middle East, there were no pogroms, no expulsions, no state-sponsored persecution, and no forced ghettos.

Today, left-wing anti-colonial antisemitism is trickling into marginal communities because of the Gaza war, but a national consensus remains in support of a mutual fight against Islamic extremism.

Both countries are industrious and innovative. "Israel is often called the 'startup nation,'" Modi told the Knesset. "Our aspirational spirit aligns naturally with Israel's innovation ecosystem. I see a lot of synergies in areas such as quantum technologies, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence. We are also working with Israel on creating cross-border financial linkages using our Digital Public Infrastructure." Indeed, Netanyahu and Modi announced an additional 16 economic, security and diplomatic agreements. Israeli President Isaac Herzog summed up the India-Israel relationship beautifully: "two ancient nations. Two modern democracies. One strategic partnership changing the world for the better." Canada can learn a thing or two from this incredible partnership. Perhaps Canada's next stop after India could be Jerusalem, the city of peace.

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